

## ABSTRACT

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The essence of this thesis is to explore what form public art takes on in order to visualize Anacostia's community identity during the urban revitalization of the neighborhood. The current small and large-scale revitalization efforts by the City (Washington D.C.) are showing change in both the physical and social fabric of the community and neighborhood. As a predominantly African American community that has faced disinvestment and injustices--socially, economically, and politically—many residents are concerned that these City efforts will physically displace them, as well as the collective memory of the community. This thesis seeks to transform a vacant lot, slated for development, into a temporary, transient, multi-functional public art design for engaging the community in the process of exploration and expression of their community identity. Public art is used as a strategy to provide a platform for residents to effectively become present, visible and audible at a time when many residents feel as though they are not part of Anacostia's future.

# ANACOSTIA: COMMUNITY AS FORM

By

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## Introduction

The essence of this thesis is to explore how public art can embody Anacostia's community identity during the urban revitalization of the neighborhood. The increased public and private economic investments and redevelopment projects in the neighborhood show change in both the physical and social fabric of Anacostia's community and neighborhood. As a predominantly African American community that has faced disinvestment and injustices—socially, economically, and politically—many residents are concerned that urban revitalization efforts will not only physically displace them, but also pave over the collective memory of the community. This thesis addresses the issue that there are many people in disenfranchised neighborhoods, such as Anacostia, who are being underserved by key investors, who include city leaders, corporate leaders, and the design professional they employ. It also the design profession and questions what strategies can give a voice to those who currently feel, as they do not have one. Anacostia is a neighborhood whose stories and identity have been told by others often enough, and deserve to be told by its own residents. In addition, this thesis provides a public art case study, transforming a vacant lot, slated for redevelopment, into a transient, multi-functional creative hub for engaging the community in the process of exploration and expression of their identity. In a community that has been largely separated from the central city, the issue of asserting identity is a critical one. The thesis hypothesizes that having an awareness of one's community identity provides a platform for residents to effectively become present, visible, and audible in shaping their future in Anacostia.



This design-research thesis synthesizes the topics of public art and community identity. Thorough analysis of the literature and three case studies of public art precedents, the designer takes the stance on the role and form that public art embodies in order to achieve design goals, these include:

- Preserve and celebrate culture, history, and traditions while embracing change.
- Create a platform for community engagement based on collaboration, conversation, and dialogue.
- Become a visual anchor for the community.

Public art is often as much about urban design or social issues as it is about art and has the ability to be a valuable social tool that can strategically help to shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood. This design project utilizes public art as a strategy to transform a vacant lot into a place that populates the mind with images of community, its history, and its character. The visualization of community identity requires a shift from public art's traditional form as a single object in public space to a form that cultivates a platform for participation and creates an experience for its users. Public art takes on the role of community-based art, in which the physical components of the design provide people the opportunity to become involved in shaping their built environment. Community-based art within this context is defined as art making between designer (landscape architect) and community that puts emphasis on the interaction and process rather than the end product.

This community-based public art project, depends on tactical urbanism—a bottom-up approach to design—that makes the community co-creators of public space. The tactics are used to re-envision urban living through the experimentation

with materials that are inexpensive and flexible, in that they can serve one purpose, such as recycled lumber for seats, but can also be taken apart and reassembled to serve another purpose as the community needs. The form of the community-based art design consists of two layers: the physical framework and the experience through programming that reinforces Anacostia's community identity. The structural elements—seating, tables, performance stage, planter boxes, etc.—are proposed as pieces of artwork that utilize the act of community participation in its construction. The production, end product, and the arrangement of the physical forms in space, are to reflect the vision of the designer whose aesthetic complements community aesthetics and needs shaped by local cultures, histories and practices. In light of the temporal occupation of the vacant lot due to future development, the design proposes future re-use or re-purposing of structural elements in other locations throughout Anacostia. Providing alternative functions ensures that the memories, social bonds, and identity of a community, associated with these objects and materials, are not lost during redevelopment of the site. In this context the design functions as a catalyst for the community to embrace change.

The second layer of community-based art moves beyond the physical and becomes about creating an experience for the users. Programming, structured around arts and culture, is to facilitate the activation of community identity through: dialogue, sharing, participation, and expression. In order to encourage these experiences, the programming of space and activities responds to the daily locality and activities as well as those activities that occur on a sporadic basis. This is necessary as community identity continuously evolves, and as such, the programming

changes with time, responding to the needs of the community, seasonality, and time of day-- creating an ever-changing landscape.

The design's form and program are a product of the designer's exploration of layers that make up Anacostia's community identity: resources and assets, movement and interaction, neighborhood texture, and the needs and concerns of the community. Immersion into the Anacostia community for the past year served as an opportunity to add information beyond what can be gathered from pure observation, allowing the designer to experience particular attitudes about place and culture from an insiders view. This approach assured that important aspects of the community were reflected in the design. Active engagement with community members included informal interviews, forming partnerships with people and community organizations, and participation in community events and meetings. From these interactions, the designer found that Anacostia's community identity is not just a result of its unique history, natural features, and built environment; community identity is activated through the movement, expression, and activities of the people.

Though the design is specific to the Anacostia's community, the design process and approach are flexible enough to adapt to other communities. The landscape strategy integrates temporality with long-term urban planning projects and creates value for the citizens from *day one* - and long after the redevelopment of Anacostia is completed.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

Public art today lacks recognizable features that define traditional forms of art as contemporary artists reject traditional media; blur the line between art and other media; and challenge customary display formats (Thompson 2012). The evolution of public art and the results intended have moved beyond the traditional 3D, sculptural object in space to ephemeral or intangible forms and making it difficult to develop a fixed definition. The field encompasses place-making, environmental activism, cause-related art, installations, interdisciplinary performance events, community-based initiatives, and the list goes on. In this context, public art becomes an open-ended field to express oneself. Today, with more than 350 public art programs in the United States, the literature continues to try and answer questions such as: What constitutes the public art field today? Why is public art beneficial to a community? What are crucial issues in the field? (Monograph 2010). This section introduces key events that moved contemporary art from its idealist position in the museum space to the public and urban space in order to illustrate the evolution of public art's content and form in order to identify the form public art takes on for this thesis design, with the goal of reflecting Anacostia's community identity.

### *Public Art: Form and Function*

The ambiguity of defining and identifying public arts origins continues to challenge not just artists but designers, planners, funders, and the public (Lacy 1995). For the purpose of this thesis, which explores public art as a social tool, the history of public art begins in the 1960s. This era introduced a movement of socially and

environmentally conscious artists to challenge modernist ideologies. Artwork produced under 20<sup>th</sup> century modernist thought resulted in “art dislocated from life and obsessed with scientific notion of absolute truth, technological progress and the separation of humanity from nature” (Miles 1997). The movement brought earthwork, land artists and other socially conscious artists, such as Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* and Michael Heitzer’s *Double Negative*, to begin the process of rectifying Modernism’s detachment of life from art. Artists began transitioning from modernisms “uncontaminated and pure idealist space”-museums, galleries, studios-to the natural landscape or the “impure and ordinary space of the everyday”-the public sphere (Kwon 2002).

Artists who stepped outside the galleries and museums to address issues of social context and site-specificity where introduced to a new canvas—the public space. These artists were entering the traditional domain of the landscape architects, “taking into account a complexity of social, political, historical, topographical, and architectural considerations” (Thompson 2012); working within the limits and with people whose main interests were not aesthetic ones-bureaucrats, safety engineers, and citizens (Howett, 1985). Site-specific art was to be experienced in the here and now through the physical presence of the viewer as a way to reject the autonomy and universality of modern art idealisms. Despite the initial enthusiasm towards the shift of bringing art to the everyday people, by the mid 1970s public artworks began to be criticized as being extensions of the museum, such as *La Grande Vitesse* by Alexander Calder, 1967 and Isamu Noguchi’s *Red Cube*, 1968, and was viewed as a way for artists to promote their individual accomplishments rather than making any

genuine gesture toward public engagement. These were public artworks based on their placement in open, accessible space, but did not serve a public function necessarily. It is important to distinguish between public art, which takes into account its site and other contextual factors versus art in public spaces. Simply placing a sculpture in public space is not the same as designing a sculpture specifically for that site by considering its audience, physical characteristics (length, depth, height, texture, shape, scale and proportion), environmental conditions, the history of the site, etc. One key solution to the problems of public arts public relations was the adoption of site-specific principles for public art.

In 1974 the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) changed its guidelines to vaguely stipulate that public art works needed to be appropriate to the site. Whereas the program's initial 1965 goals was to provide the public with opportunities to experience the best of American contemporary art, artists were now asked not only to focus on the built environment but to contribute toward the design of unified and coherent urban spaces. This goal was further strengthened in 1982, with the Visual Art and Design programs of the NEA that encouraged the collaboration of visual artists and design professionals. Artists, including Athena Tacha, Ned Smyth, Elyn Zimmerman, and Patricia Johanson, readily adopted this approach. The movement was significant for landscape architects, as responsibilities in the design decisions of public spaces became a shared venture between artist and designer (Howett 1985). The implication of such ventures was to render public art more accessible, accountable, and relevant to the public. Much of the public art of the 1980s, following

the design team model, were appropriated to urban street furniture expanding the definition of site-specific art to include functionality.

In 1981, Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* in New York's Federal Plaza challenged the relationship between the viewer, the site, and the work. *Tilted Arc* was a 12-foot-high, 120-foot-long steel plate with a slight curve. Serra envisioned the site as a social and political construct as well as a physical one. *Tilted Arc* was intended to have an interruptive function on Federal plaza by creating an antagonistic relationship between the artwork and its site in order to evoke dialogue about the site's sociopolitical conditions (Kwon, 2002). Soon after it was installed the sculpture was criticized for being inappropriate for the site such as: hindering how people walk through the space; its uselessness; and even enabling vandalism and criminality. Critics most notably highlighted the fact that the Tilted Arc was the result of the top-down decision-making process, dictated by small review panels of art experts and bureaucrats, and did not involve the members of the local community. After years of debate, hearings and lawsuits, the sculpture was removed in 1989 and was viewed as a rejection to "high art" by the "people" (Kwon 2002). At the bureaucratic level, this event motivated cultural authorities to re-examine their understanding of public art.

In the 1990s, public art shifted from that of renewing the physical conditions of a site to that of improving society; from promoting aesthetic quality to contributing to life. In 1989, the same year the Tilted Arc was removed from Federal Plaza, Suzanne Lacy challenged both the form and intention of what was called public art for the previous 25 years, by introducing the term New Genre Public Art (NGPA). NGPA abandoned the notion that architects and design professionals are the experts

between art and urban spaces and cast the community as the authority figure on such issues.

NGPA was a shift towards public art based on intensive engagement with the people of the site, dialogue between the artist and the immediate audience, and community participation in the conceptualization and production of artwork (Lacy 1995). A group of people previously held at a distance from the artistic process, under designations of spectator, audience, or public, was enlisted to participate in the creation of an artwork (Kwon 2002). What made NGPA stand out from art with long-standing community-based practices since the 1960s, was the uses of both traditional and non-traditional media such as: street art, guerilla theatre, video, billboards, protests and demonstrations, oral histories, dances, environments, posters, and murals to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their life.

NGPA's displacement of site-specificity by community-specificity (Kwon 2002) insisted on a reconsideration of public arts value and priorities along with alterations in its methodology and procedures. It also asserted a major rethinking of site-specificity as a means to achieve its goals, in which the site becomes something more than a place—where artists move the site into the community as activism through action and redefine the public role of art. Public artworks become more than objects in space—they can be ideas, places, and actions.

The emergence of New Genre Public Art pushed the conversation of community and public art forward into non-traditional forms. Mary Jane Jacob's, *Culture in Action*, exemplifies the model of New Genre Public Art. Over a two-year



period (1991-1993) the works of *Culture in Action* shifted the role of the viewer from passive spectator to active art maker. Using the urban environment as the stage and active participation of residents in the creation of the artworks, *Culture in Action* “tested the territory of public interaction and participation” (Kwon 2002). Revered by many as an important public art in America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was also criticized as an exploitation of communities and “a reduction of art to a kind of inadequate and ineffectual social work” (Kwon 2002)). *Culture in Action* challenged the definition and function of contemporary public art using exploratory methods. In contrast to Chicago’s familiar forms of public art, work in *Culture in Action* was not defined in terms of material objects but by the ephemeral processes of interaction between people that occurred during activities such as: The Candy Bar, a neighborhood parade, a block party, a paint chart, hydroponic garden, bar, interactive sculpture, etc. These projects dealt with urgent issues in the communities such as AIDS, homelessness, racism, illiteracy, etc. The projects of *Culture in Action* facilitated everyday peoples’ engagement in the very process of creating their own cultural representation and giving a voice to underrepresented and disempowered groups.

The highlighting of marginalized and disenfranchised social groups in community-based collaborative art projects is an attempt to counter if not compensate for these groups’ lack of social visibility and political power (Kwon 2002). Critic Grant Kester questions the rhetoric of community artists who position themselves as the vehicle for an “unmediated expressivity on the part of a given community.” Kester argues this stance as a potentially abusive use of the community for the advancement of the artist’s personal agenda. Miwon Kwon, in her book *One Place*

*After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, also questions the assumption that a community-based artwork will necessarily produce an accurate, inclusive and beneficial outcome for the community in question (2002). Public art works that operate with social contexts are expected to validate people's identity and quality of life. Conflicts tend to stem from the multilayered reality of these identities and lifestyles, the organic composition of communities, and the complex relations an individual artist can establish with them. Kester argues that a danger that many artists and people from outside the community face is oversimplifying the desires and needs of a community. These projects are best accomplished when the idea or subject of the artwork is determined by the community or is the community itself in some way—who orchestrate situations in which the community participants invest time and energy in a collective project or process, securing the participants sense of identification or ownership in the work (Thompson 2002).

The evolution of public art to more than just a single object in space takes on the challenge to create “place” and intangible results as a means to take on a novel public art form. Moving towards public art that emphasizes process, inclusion, collaboration and conversation, rather than just the end result, public art has the power to humanize the built environment, create new relationship to a place, and reframe how people perceive their environments (Landry 2012).

### *Tactical Urbanism*

The principles of tactical urbanism when combined with aesthetic expression allow public art to have a role in the reunification of form and social values in the

urban setting. Borrowing from military terminology, “tactical urbanism” has caught the recent attention of policymakers, planners, artists, and community members alike, creating a new attitude towards public space. Tactical urbanism employs strategic actions aimed at controlling physical space in order to transfer the tactics of social resistance movements to the realm of urbanism (a&t 2002). Though certainly not a new phenomena, citizens are increasingly using urban space to advance political and social justice goals. The activities of tactical urbanism blur the distinction between design and activism, in which individuals become empowered to create and implement low-cost interventions in public space aimed at solving urban dilemmas (Lydon 2012). The Do-It-Yourself (DIY) approach to urbanism is an alternative to traditional urban planning, which historically and even to this day, has excluded marginalized populations from the benefits of the changing city. The strategies of tactical urbanism seek the re-unification of the image of the city and social values, which recognize that both users and planners have roles in a non-hierarchal process (Landry 2012). The professionals who determine how a place looks and feels—architects, landscape architects, planners, government—are often limited in their insights of understanding how the emotional flow of the city works; often approaching the city from a distance that is not contingent on the lives of its inhabitants (Miles 1997). Tactical urbanism projects such as: guerilla gardening, weed bombing, pop-up retail, mobile vendors, pavement to plazas, and parklettes, begin to address the question posed by sociologist Sharon Zukin: who has the right to inhabit the dominant image of the city?

Mike Lydon, a Principal of The Street Plans Collaborative, in his report *Tactical Urbanism 2* describes tactical urbanism as an articulation of creative placemaking with a deliberate approach to city-making that feature the following five characteristics:

- A deliberate, phased approach to instigating change
- An offering of local ideas for local planning challenges
- Short-term commitment and realistic expectations
- Low-risks, with a possibly high reward
- The development of social capital between citizens, and the building of organizational capacity between public/private institutions, non-profits

Tactical urbanism requires urban dwellers to reclaim the “publicness” of their urban space and to understand their experience in the public realm through citizen-based action. Case studies from around the world reveal the benefit of taking an incremental approach to the process of city building. These small-scale projects are built and owned by the community or group through new combinations of activities that intersect the needs and assets of people. The tactics for re-envisioning urban living are based on experimentation with materials that are inexpensive and flexible to transform underused spaces. Lydon, in the report, highlights a continuum of small-scale tactics that re-envision how a place works and how it is perceived with the intent of long-term changes. Lydon does address the legal challenges of unsanctioned projects and believes that “tactical urbanism is most effective when used in conjunction with long-term planning efforts and become part of a new dialogue

between citizens, urban professionals, and politicians” (2012). Grass-root tactics that are co-opted by local governments are criticized and questioned on whether or not this process is actually helping the community or merely accelerating the process of gentrification, specifically in disenfranchised neighborhoods. In this context, process is important. If the process is top-down, a series of symbolic, programmed and design strategies are implemented under the control of the established power. In contrast, the bottom-up approach, normally involves tactical, temporary, participatory and homemade action that gives ownership to the *people*.

Alex Gilliam, founder of Public Workshop, exemplifies the tactical urbanisms strategy through his lighter, quicker, cheaper approach of placemaking. Public Workshop rejects the linear thought process of design and city planning and replaces it with a non-linear way of thinking that challenges people to think and test what else is possible in their neighborhood. Gilliam believes that the first step to creating change is by testing out the possibilities through low-risk, temporary activation of space. Public Workshop projects create opportunities for youth to participate as citizens and leaders in the design of their communities. Some of the projects take on temporary public art forms that can adapt to community needs and wants through flexible design. The tangible result is what Peter Walker refers to the framework that is necessary before variation can occur. The framework changes very little, holding together change that allows for growth, movement, and flexibility (Hester 2006).

Randolph Hester, in the book *Design for Ecological Democracy*, cautions the designer that, “if the framework is not well conceived and managed, it can calcify, producing large, rigid results.” He encourages, “multiple piecemeal intricacies-small

actions of owners and volunteers who provide variety, local initiative, and innovations in sustainability”. For Gilliam, “piecemeal intricacies” support deeper conversations within the community, increase participation in decision-making and expands ownership of those decisions.

While participatory projects, such as *Culture in Action* and those from Public Workshop, are far removed from what one might first think of as public art, what field they do belong to is hard to articulate (Thompson 2012). While it is difficult to categorize socially engaged artworks into neat disciplines, what these artworks have in common is that they shift the conversation away from arts’ typical lens of analysis: aesthetics (Thompson 2012). This is not to say that the visual holds no place in this work, but instead the approach emphasizes the forms for social impact. Claire Bishop, from her analysis and critique of socially engaged art, frames this artistic practice as challenging the capitalist production of objects, which is consumed by passive subjects with very little agency or empowerment (Thompson 2012). She argues, “there must be an art of action, interfacing with reality, taking steps-however small-to repair the social bond” (Bishop 2012). In other words, participatory art precludes the traditional idea of spectatorship and suggests a new understanding of art without audiences, one in which everyone is a producer” (Bishop 2012). Projects highlighted in the book *Living As Form: Socially Engaged Art From 1991-2011*, begin to explore life- participation, sociality, and the organization of bodies in space as a form of art. A challenge to evaluating artworks in these unconventional forms—the intentional intertwining of life and art—comes from the challenge of answering questions such

as: How does one distinguish between the two? How does this work constitute art?  
How does this work constitute civic action?

### *Creative Placemaking*

One of the goals for this thesis is to root people to place through the visualization of Anacostia's community identity. Placemaking at its core seeks to foster people's attachment to place through purposeful design of urban spaces. The origins of placemaking can trace back to the works of urban thinkers like Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch and William Whyte, who in the 1960s advocated a new way to understand, design and program public spaces by putting people and community ahead of efficiency and aesthetics. During this time placemaking was a reaction against auto-centric planning and bad public spaces (Silberberg 2013). As discussed previously, public art during the same time was also reacting to the autonomy of places that resulted from modernisms disconnect between city and people. The evolution of public arts dynamic shift from a single object in space to taking on a shape that creates experience in space, produces what Ann Markenson calls *creative placemaking*<sup>1</sup>.

Creative placemaking strategically shapes the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around the arts and cultural activities. (Markusen 2010). The success of creative placemaking evolves from places that are designed with what Randolph Hester calls *centerdness*. The term refers to centers that aggregate shared experiences, activities, and interests foster sense of community and

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Markusen, Creative Placemaking: White Paper for The Mayor's Institute on City Design, a leadership initiative on the National Endowment for the Arts.

attachments. “A place without centeredness diminishes local identity, local attachments, rootedness, place knowledge, and the capacity to work together with other communities,” (Hester 2006). Multiuse centers; sociopetal places that encourage interaction; and places for community rituals are specific design actions that create good centers that reclaim centeredness (Hester 2006). Centers are starting points in human development because they provide rooted identity in a home place. City-design theorists from Lewis Mumford to Suzanne Keller (*The Urban Neighborhood: A Sociological Perspective* 1968) conclude that communities require centers for economic efficiency, physical legibility, primary social contracts, sense of community, and local attachments.

Hester outlines 10 Rules to Good Centers in *Designing for Ecological Democracy*. An important aspect of centeredness is an open-ended design. He first emphasizes that good centers are, “intense concentrations of different uses,” each node of activity serves as a point of orientation and invite investments of time and energy. He cautions that creating multiple-use settings in centers become effective only if they match the patterns of local activities or if local values and behaviors change to fit the possibilities of the space. While outsider perspectives are important in catalyzing aspects of a community that some residents might take for granted, Markusen cautions artists and designers that, “public art that ignores the history, values, and needs of the community in which it’s placed is failed public art.” Creative placemaking calls for a process that integrates design with community information. According to Ronald Lee Fleming, founder of Townscape Institute, “for artworks to contribute meaningfully to our experience of place they need to be

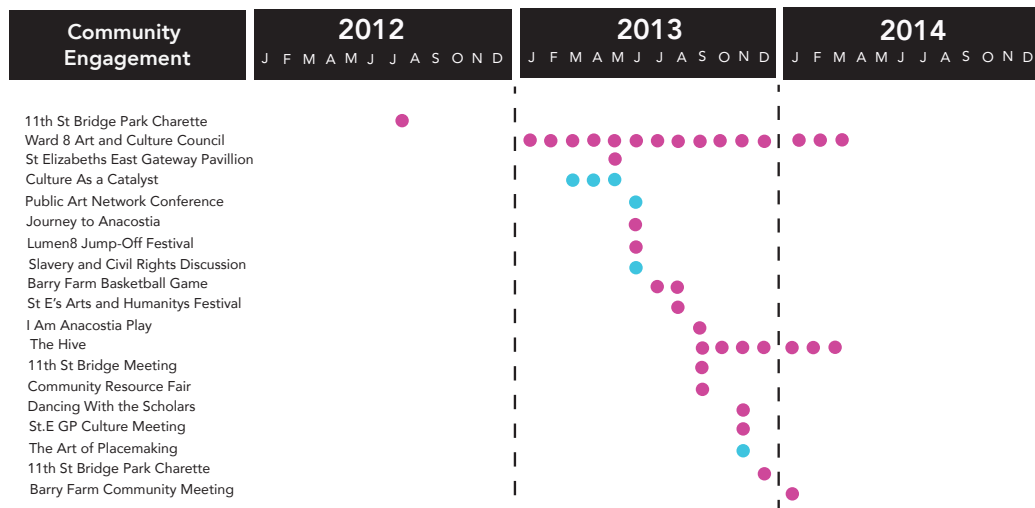


created through a design process that seeks to translate into physical form the needs, values, desires, dreams, and passion of the people in that place.” Anne Whiston Spirn, Professor of Landscape Architecture and Planning at MIT (Silberberg 2012), believes that a critical step to reestablish residents’ attachment to their community is to raise their literacy about the resources, the problems, the local history, and the alternatives for the future and how these factors are related.

For this thesis the designer approached the task of raising the community’s literacy about the resources, problems, local history, and the possibilities for the future—community identity—by first understanding what shapes this identity. Designers do not always have the chance to interact directly with the specific people who will use the site. While designers can extrapolate the expected user population using marketing studies, demographics, and other predictive devices, there is no substitute for talking to site users and stakeholders directly (Calkins 2012). Landscape architect, Walter Hood, believes that in order to truly understand a community you must become a member of that community (Hood 1997). Perhaps not in the sense of setting up residency, but rather by actively engaging and familiarizing oneself with the community to the point where the designer begins to experience particular attitudes about place and culture from an insiders view. To achieve familiarity, Hood puts himself in the community to see who the people are and his own connections to them, what they are doing, and what their needs are (Hood 1997). In order to gain this level of cultural competency, the designer used the data collection method of ethnography to engage with the community discussed in the following section.

### Community Engagement

The designer used the qualitative research method of ethnography to explore and understand the culture of the Anacostia community (Demming and Swaffield 2011). Since July 2012, the designer has strategically immersed in the community culture to obtain the information needed for understanding its identity (Figure 1). Ethnographic methods are a means of tapping into local point of views and community knowledge to identify significant categories of human experience up close and personal. Through intensive study of a single field or domain, a blend of historical, observational, and interview methods stitches together “a portrait of the people” (Harris 2000). Typical ethnographical research employs three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents. This in turn produces three kinds of data: quotations, descriptions, and excerpts of documents—including but not limited to maps, master plans, and historic material—resulting in one product, a narrative description (Genzuk 2003). The designer used informal interviews, participation in community events, and observation to obtain insight not just of the complex historical and demographic context, but of the cultural practices related to the building of community.



**Figure 1: Outline of Community Events & Activities Attended**

Since ethnographic research takes place among human beings, there were a number of ethical concerns to be aware of. First, the designer clearly communicated research goals to the members of the community, which for this thesis was gaining an understanding of the community identity in Anacostia. In addition, the designer understood the delicate balance between participant and observer while experiencing an environment as an insider—through relationships and friendships with community members. It was important to continuously reevaluate this relationship to assure that a balance was maintained. The challenge was to combine the two so as to become capable of understanding the experience as an insider while describing the experience for outsiders.

Understanding Anacostia's community identity depended on reaching out to a diverse population of people. Informal conversational interviews sought to get at differing information depending on the interviewee. This style of interview allowed for free flowing conversations, with responses shaped by the subjects and their interaction with the designer. It also removed pressure from subjects to allow them to

talk candidly rather than respond with what they thought the designer wanted to hear. After a brief introduction of the thesis topic by the designer, respondents were open to providing valuable information that referenced: cultural experience, family narratives, individual and community traditions, history, values and beliefs, and community needs.

Before moving into a discussion of the different interactions with the community, a note regarding the use of community engagement in Anacostia is warranted. Anacostia, like many disenfranchised neighborhoods, suffers from negative past experiences of outsiders imposing development plans. The designer's approach of continuous interaction with the community and adhering to basic human interaction, based on trust and respect, was effective for this particular community, enabling the formation of friendships with community members. On January 26, 2013 at William O. Lockridge Library, SE Washington D.C., the designer attended a Ward 8 Arts and Culture Council evening meeting (6-8 pm). A total of 12 Ward 8 artists and small business owners were in attendance. The goals of the Committee and the designer coincided, both tending to local residents to have a place and voice through the arts during redevelopment in Ward 8. The designer built a working relationship with the chair of the Committee, Tendani Mpulubusi El, an active Anacostia community member and local artist, who provided the bridge between the community and designer. The intimate connection with the community was largely due to the support of Mr. Mpbulubsi El in helping the designer engage on such a level. This relationship allowed the designer to observe and experience daily activities that took place during the weekdays, weekends, morning, afternoon, and night. Having

somebody who was active in the community as Mr. Mpulubusi provided access to a larger audience and allowed for insight into aspects of the community that would not have been possible without this relationship. For the past year the designer spent at least three days out of the week in Anacostia in order to share as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the people in the observed setting. The participation of the designer in community events and everyday experiences provided a rich, multi-faceted understanding of the community (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Pictures Taken At Community Events**

The designer reached out to key informants at an individual, community, and city government level. Informants at the individual and community level consisted of local artists, existing and prospective business owners; the Arch Development Corporation staff; members of the Anacostia Neighborhood Association; members of the Ward 8 council; teachers at Savoy Elementary, Thurgood Marshall Charter School, and Excel Academy; staff of Matthews Memorial Baptist Church; and D.C.

Metropolitan Police Department. At the city level, the designer sought out information from D.C. Office of Planning employees to gain a better understanding of the reality of plans and initiatives put forth by the city government and developers.

Most interviews stemmed from unscheduled opportunities that arose from daily interactions with community members. The interviews aimed at understanding community interests and needs and identifying community interests and needs. This informal approach was beneficial in obtaining the many facets of the community that may not have arisen from formal interviews. In September the designer was approached with an opportunity to use the Hive, a co-work space on Good Hope Rd., in order to provide a consistent, physical space within the community—during the weekdays. The designer utilized the Hive primarily for thesis writing and research with little interaction with the community there. Instead, engagement with the community occurred while dining at the local restaurants—Big Chair Café and Uniontown Bar and Grill—during lunch breaks and in the evening after leaving the Hive (Figure 3). Being the only sit down restaurants in the area, this is a social gathering place for locals, workers, and visitors. Most people already know each other, creating a social dynamic that reflects a strong sense of community. The consistent interaction with the community provided insight into the daily patterns and activities of the locals.



**Figure 3: Local Restaurants: Uniontown Bar and Grill and Big Chair Café (Left to Right)**

In addition to experiencing and observing the daily activities in Anacostia, the designer made efforts to participate and engage with residents through community events and meetings to enhance the personal relationship with the community. The designer not only observed what was happening in the community but *felt* what it was like to be a part of it. Monthly attendance of the Anacostia Neighborhood Association, River East Emerging Leaders meetings, and Ward 8 Arts and Culture Council meetings granted the designer access to the extensive suggestions and feedback on a variety of community issues from participants. On January 9, 2014 from 6:30-9 pm at Excel Academy, the attendance to a Barry Farm community meeting (held every Thursday) illustrated to the designer the resident's frustrations toward current and future revitalization plans. At this particular meeting the developers of the new Barry Farm mixed-use development were in attendance. The aim of the meeting was to introduce to the community the site plan concept and get feedback from the residents. Figure 4 provides a sense of the large attendance turn out.



**Figure 4: Barry Farm Community Meeting**

The general consensus of the meeting was the residents felt like their input was not genuinely being acknowledged and a sense of hopelessness was prevalent. The meeting opened with the agenda, an update of the Barry Farm Development Plan, and an overview of the Master Plan. The meeting included three brief presentations addressing the: Residential Blocks and Street Grid, Open Space and Recreation, and Retail Options. Each presentation was followed by a ten-minute break out session for a facilitated discussion, followed by the digital polling of responses (clickers were used to capture responses). During the first break out session, residents expressed frustration towards the proposed plan. One gentleman, when asked by the facilitator what he liked about the plan, responded, “ I don’t like anything. It’s not for us. There is nothing that reflects what our community is about.” He then proceeded to walk out of the meeting. Another resident said, “the proposed street layout breaks up the block into secluded neighborhoods. The layout of Barry Farm now supports how we socialize in the community.”

After the meeting the designer approached several residents to get an idea of how they felt the community has been part of the design process of Barry Farm redevelopment projects. There was a general consensus that the redevelopment is not for them; instead it’s for a new population. One woman expressed, “They (the developers) did not reach out enough. They did not knock on doors or sit down with people. Instead we got two meetings prior to this one, asking for our input, and it has not been reflected in what I saw tonight. Tonight the meeting was not about the residents it was about people who don’t live here. They don’t care about us.” It should be noted that two previous meetings with residents were held in October and



November of 2013 to get input from residents. This meeting highlights only one of many interactions the designer has had with residents who voiced these same concerns of displacement and socioeconomic injustices from revitalization efforts. Attendance to meetings such as this one showed the designer that people do care about their future in Anacostia but feel as though no matter what they say their voices won't be heard.

The community spirit and the social networks that exist in Anacostia became most apparent when attending community events. Events such as Lumen8, St. Elizabeth's Art and Humanities Festival, Anacostia Playhouse performances, open-mic nights, Barry Farm basketball games, and community cookouts highlighted the talents, assets, and resources that reside in the community.

On February 7, 2014 the designer participated in the Ward 8 Arts and Culture Council's first social event, consisting of wine and paint workshop, a drumming circle, games, celebration of black history month through poems, and the showcasing of Ward 8 artists (jewelry makers, book writers, food artists, vocalists, and painters). This event brought together the voices of the community that the designer heard individually in informal interviews with residents and stakeholders over the past year. They shared their wants, needs, concerns, joys of their community, and most importantly illustrated Anacostia's community identity, which is discussed in the following section of this chapter.

The event showed the designer that Anacostia's community identity is not just something you have as a result of a community's unique history, natural features, and built environment; community identity is activated through the movement,

expression, and activities of the people. A large part of Anacostia's community identity comes through music and dance. An important component of community events in Anacostia is Go-Go music. Southeast D.C. is home to Washington D.C.'s homegrown genre of music, Go-Go. This unique regional style of music has West African roots and is recognized for its rhythm using signature instruments: the congo, cowbell, and drum. Originating in the mid- 1960s and early 70s the fan base today covers all age groups.

Long time resident Melvin B., who has worked with the community for over 20 years leading the African Heritage Dancers and Drummers Program, led the drum circle that night. The rhythm of Go-Go permeated through people as they beat on paint buckets (provided by Melvin) and as people joined in through dance. Figure 5 shows that this tradition of music and dance in the community is a powerful tool to bring people of all ages and races together to share in positive interactions. Several breaks in the drum circle allowed for Melvin to share the experience and knowledge that he has gained through drumming and dance:

“You can get high from dancing. When you dance or do any physical activity you stimulate endorphins in the body and it makes you feel good. I tell people that in African culture if you do not drum and dance you are hiding yourself. But when you drum and dance you show people who you really are. Do it as often as you can so you can learn who you are and others can learn who you are. And you both can respect each other and yourself at the same time.”



**Figure 5: Ward 8 Arts and Culture Council Social Event**

A main goal of the event was to bring people together to learn, share, and leverage the resources and assets that already exist in the community. It was about supporting each other's ideas, concerns, values, and talents using art as the common language. Melvin ended the drum circle by expressing his view on what the next step the community needs to take to become part of Anacostia's future:

“Come on y'all this is your ward 7 and 8. It belongs to you. You see folks where you did not see them before new residents. And they are having a ball. And then you see others standing around asking ‘How did that happen?’ You have to be unafraid; you have to be bold, aggressive and part of the way. When it comes to fighting, and shooting, and stabbing, I can give out the academy award to folks in Wards 7 and 8 for the way we show our negative. But when it comes to showing our positive, come on now, you have to get it together and do the right thing. Enjoy yourself, love each other, and be unified. We cannot afford not to support what they are doing here (referencing the vision of the Ward 8 Art and Culture Council) with your presence and your energy. So I challenge you to come out of a slave mode of thinking and become free. Become free. The only way I could be able to do what I am doing for 57 years is to define myself. Nobody comes to tell me who I am. I say, no let me tell you who you think I am and I'm going to tell you who I am.”

This message of becoming part of the change instead of letting change define one's future is what many people of the community feel is not part of the community conversation. One resident asked at a Ward 8 Art and Culture Council meeting,

“People see and talk about the changes going on around them, yet they do nothing about it, it is really frustrating, do they care?” Another women responded by saying, “I do not sense that our residents have a true appreciation and faith to move us forward. I wonder if that is the reason why there has not been a candid conversation about how we see the future of our community.”

The information obtained from community engagement tend to fall into two categories; those who feel that the City needs to come and take care of things and those who feel residents should and will have to do it themselves. Like Melvin, Diane Dale, author of the book *The Village that Shaped Us: A Look at Washington D.C. 's Anacostia Community* and fifth generation Anacostia resident, feels strongly that there needs to be a greater understanding and sense of community identity if there is going to be a future for residents in the revitalized Anacostia. She believes that, “If you do not know where you come from and who you are—identity—you will not know where you are going.” The crux of this thesis uses public art and design in tandem to foster interactions between people in the community in order to highlight this identity.

### *Community Identity and Anacostia*

Two terms that continue to be ambiguous in many community-based public art projects are *community* and *community identity*. It is important to define these as they relate to Anacostia. Ann Marksens, at the *Art of Placemaking* conference in Providence Rhode Island 2013, stated that:

We need to be more purposeful, targeted and explicit about who our creative placemaking strategies are intended to benefit from

the beginning. Asking question such as: Who is the community for which there is identity and a sense of place? Who are we improving the quality of life for? Who benefits from a revitalized economy? If we're working in communities that are distressed, poor or communities of color, how do residents benefit from revitalization efforts? Answering these questions explicitly provides transparency of intent for the people who will be affected by design.

The term community can hold a variety of definitions depending on the context of who is doing the defining: based on geographic region, municipality, neighborhood (open to a variety of definitions), ethnic, or shared historical and racial (Guetzkow 2002). Identifying the scope in which community is defined provides a framework for which the identity of a community can begin to form. For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of community borrows from Kathleen Macqueen in her journal article *What is Community? An Evidence-Based Definition for Participatory Health*: “a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings” (MacQueen 2001). In Anacostia, this not only refers to residents but also people who work and participate in the social and physical dimensions of the culture who may not live in Anacostia.

During this time of change in Anacostia—in both its landscape and population base—existing natural features, culture, and sources of community pride must be guaranteed a place in the community's future. As stated in the introduction, this thesis hypothesizes that an awareness of community identity provides a platform for residents to effectively become present, visible, and audible in shaping their future in Anacostia. Often community identity is defined through reflecting a neighborhood's

unique history, natural features, culture(s) and sources of community pride. Despite the importance of history and heritage, too often community residents and planners do not dedicate sufficient attention and resource to preserving spaces and objects, documenting stories, and recording and facilitating a community's contemporary cultural practices (Block 2008). In addition to the traditional ways to reflect community identity, this thesis takes into account present cultural practices that view community as "not only something you have, it's something you do" (Wenger 1998). This suggests that implementation strategies for the proposed design must not only address physical issues within the Anacostia community, but also include activities and events to bring them together in order for community identity to take on form.

It is important to note that while people from the community have the necessary information, it often takes an outsider to catalyze identification of and discussion about important aspects of the community that some residents might take for granted, or to foster communication and learning between disparate groups (Wenger 1998). The designer, who does not live in Anacostia, approaches the task of learning and understanding this community and its identity using the qualitative research method of ethnography. This method is designed to explore and observe a group or individual from the view of the subject/s of the research; and is meant to capture the social meanings and ordinary activities of people in there naturally occurring settings. The goal is to collect data in such a way that the researcher imposes a minimal amount of their own bias on the data. Chapter 4 discusses how ethnography is applied to the Anacostia community, as well as its community identity.

### Summary

Public art for this thesis fosters a powerful civic experience of connection to place. As our society and its modes of expression evolve, so will our definition of public art. The public art interventions introduced in the literature review reflect the desire to give form to what Ernst Bloch calls, “the not yet conscious; that which anticipates and illuminates what might be possible” (Thompson 2012). William P. Stewart, Dereck Liebert and Kevin W. Larkin in *Community Identities as Visions for Landscape Change*, point out that the inevitable changes in the context of the landscape due to urban revitalization process are not a problem. Instead the primary concerns are the abilities of communities to influence the nature of their growth and relationship to these changes (Stewart 2003). People should have the opportunity and the means to be involved in the process of decision making which shapes their built environment and consequently their lives. Designers who are committed to designing for the everyday must find ways to engage the people of the community in order to uncover the critical factors within that specific community. Tactical urbanism is a strategy to achieve this community engagement and allows for necessary change due to its flexible design solutions.

The literature review provides the designer with the following components of public art and how these components relate to thesis goals:

**Intent:** The primary goal of rooting people to place by visualizing community identity requires public art to take on the role as a social tool.

**Process:** The use of tactical urbanism strategies in public art is a way for people in the community to engage in the revitalization of their environments.

**Form:** The concept of public art as more than just an object, takes on an active role in shaping an “experience.”

The thesis proposes a design that combines the frameworks of public art, tactical urbanism, and creative placemaking to create a place that reflects community identity; fosters civic ownership; and provides a platform for residents to have a voice during and after redevelopment. The design will consist of a physical form that is inspired by the locality and highlights special values of the community to provide the framework for public artwork. The programming of space will facilitate movement and interactions between people activate community identity. The expression of ideas, creativity, talent, and values through aesthetic forms such as performances, paintings, sculptures, gardens, etc. by the community provide the layers of meaning and attachment to place to foster and strengthen the social bonds needed to make the community present and heard during Anacostia’s time of change.



## Chapter 2: Precedents

This chapter focuses on three community-based public art precedents—Les Lieux Possibles, Place Au Changement, and Tactile Anacostia—that foster public participation, community development, and stimulates public dialogue. These three art and cultural projects move beyond a single art object in space to create experiences in which people see the vision of their community reflected in a public space. They accomplish this through community-based art that uses a tactical urbanism framework of experimentation, use of inexpensive material, and user participation as a form of material. The outcome of these community-based public art projects is that they accomplish creative placemaking, which uses art and culture to ground people to a particular place—making them feel they are somewhere they know that is theirs.

This chapter outlines the context for each precedent and draws from them aspects of community-based art that provide a framework to visualize Anacostia's community identity discussed at length in the Design Response chapter.

- Physical Form: Les Lieux Possibles
- Design Process and Programming: Place Au Changement
- Narrative: Tactile Anacostia

*Les Lieux Possibles*

Bruit du Frigo, France

Bruit du Frigo is an entity formed by professionals from several different disciplines (architecture, urbanism, media, landscape architecture, sociology, etc.) whose teams are organized according to the requirements' of each project. Bruit du Frigo is dedicated to the study and intervention at the city and local level through participatory, artistic, and cultural initiatives.

*Les Lieux Possibles* program was set up in five locations in the Bordeaux metropolitan area to make the citizens aware of the creative potential of urban voids and the possibilities for improvement, with very few resources, of our everyday environment. The projects, "all lightly manipulate the territory they work on, temporarily shift uses and stimulate user imagination and these users enact other possible users in those settings which are unfamiliar to them," (a&t 2011). For the designer the most important part of this precedent are the built structures that facilitate "the local residents to find out their real desires and to let them put forward ideas, be they realistic or completely utopian, concerning the city they want to live in," (a&t 2011).

The primary material of wood (flats, boards, sheets) was used to create multi-purpose furniture- table, chair, lounge, stage, or recreational element- to support activities such as: artistic interventions, workshops, community dinners, reading rooms, performance space, playground, and classroom. The shapes and orientation of design elements create undefined spaces, leaving room for people to define their own use of space. Fostering freedom in the use of space means that it is the people that

make the structure have purpose and meaning; people are the thread that stitches together function (Figure 6).



**Figure 6: Physical Form: Les Lieux Possibles**

The use of inexpensive materials and the simplicity of the foundational structures serve as precedents for this thesis. Flexible design provides an opportunity for pre-development programming in which the temporary activation of space functions according to the people who it is for. The proposed design is to act as a framework in which members of the Anacostia community can work together to create a shared space and provide detours to imagine the future of the neighborhood. On a broader scale, the act of the community being a part of the designing and

building process can provide workforce development skills for community members—who have stressed the need for such services.

*Place Au Changement*

Collectif etc., France

Collectif Etc. acts experimentally on public space to put forward more artistic interventions on the city. Place Au Changement (Embracing Change) is a temporary project with a cross-disciplinary approach in urban planning and design that targets a diverse public: the residents, the temporary users of public space and the “specialized actors who function as discoverers of the citizens’ hidden desires,” (Collectif etc.). The entire operation was funded by the participants, institutions, public and private organizations, and people interested in the project. The timeframe was during the physical transformation that the city and neighborhood was undergoing. For three years (July 2011-2014) Embracing Change has occupied the area reserved to construct a new building. Collectif Etc. collaborated with local residents to renovate a public space in a disused plot before building works began. The overarching goal of the tactical proposal was to activate a place through the activation of the population; by having the users build the site, the site becomes theirs.

The concept and programming behind the project provides precedents for how to activate a multi-functional space that supports community needs during a transitional time in the neighborhood (Figure 7). The design concept lays out a hypothetical floor plan of the future housing block on the void and on the wall is a hypothetical section of the new building. The spaces, which form the layout of the vacant lot, recreate the different rooms in a dwelling. Furnished terraces that act like

living rooms, dining rooms or bedrooms have been laid out around a central garden.

An important part of this precedent for the designer is how the concept gets people to start a dialogue about the future use of the land and neighborhood.



**Figure 7: Process and Programming: Place Au Changement**

The Collective etc. worked with residents for the realization of how public space can be used, both in the short and long-term, through the exchange and involvement of the population in the design process and programming. For the duration of the project, a series of daily events were implemented as a way to diversify the maximum range of activities in order to reach a wider audience. Garden Tournaments balls, Argentine tango classes (El Caminito) and initiations circus (Feedback Asso) were scheduled on certain days of the 6 weeks of construction. Collaboration with the "Ladies of Cote-Hot", a self-managed group women, provided a festival atmosphere as they cooked large dishes (couscous, paella and tangine) every Friday starting at 10 am for the neighborhood. Musical evenings were also held every Saturday open to residents with alternating scenes such as: DJ mix soul-electro, acoustic concerts and dance hall, bringing together a very eclectic audience who gathered around the bar set up and managed by residents. To close each week,

film screenings were held Sunday night. All these events were free and open to all. It was important not to dismiss anyone one from these opportunities, therefore the concept of gratuity was important. Only food and drinks were paid for, but in affordable ranges from 50 cents for soft drinks and 6 euros per dish. The attendance was variable, ranging from a dozen people to hundreds for evening concerts.

Addressing the issue of manual labor and maintenance for the proposed three years was crucial for the success of the involvement of residents in achieving public spaces for the public. Several meetings with city officials, designers, and residents (all took place at the site, so anybody could participate) allowed for exploration of community resources and tools that already existed. From the meetings, “A relationship of trust has been strengthened and allowed to have interesting discussions especially on the issue of the city and neighborhood. Stories were told, and desires were expressed, ” (Collective etc.). A strategy used by Collective etc. was charging volunteers with addressing passerbys to explain the project and its challenges, while inviting everyone to come and participate. This strategy had a goal to, “ reach as many people as possible, especially those who are not use to being given a voice or that their ideas are valued,” (Colletive etc.).

The program and concept behind Place Au Changement (Embracing Change) project exemplifies how temporary use of space and management can provide a time for discussion and testing of opportunities that benefit the community. In addition, it illustrates how the occupation of space in transition can complement and become a part of the major phases of urban projects. “The notion of time in the world of construction is different from the notion of time among the people, there may be a

stake to reinvest the dead time of the project, to a greater acceptance of urban operations often frowned upon,” (Collective etc.). Though the project permits the community to test things, to experience a different way of achieving a public space, it still raises many questions of: the economic viability of this type of intervention, the issue of volunteering in relation to work, the possibility of its application on larger scales, or on the issue of sustainability in the time of this space designed by non-professionals.

### *Tactile Anacostia*

Carmen C. Wong, Anacostia, Washington D.C.

This last precedent is a local public art project that taps into the stories of people in Anacostia and neighboring Ward 8 communities. The Tactile Anacostia-Workshop series was presented as part of the Lumen8 Anacostia Festival during the summer of 2013. Introduced by conceptual food artist Carmen C. Wong, Tactile Anacostia is characterized as an ephemeral art project. As the artist, Carmen created a framework that allowed for a narrative and performance to evolve through the collecting of local ingredients; formulating a story around ingredients; capturing the story through eating; and preserving the stories through canning (Figure 8).



**Figure 8: Narrative: Tactile Anacostia**

The designer had a chance to speak with Carmen on several occasions to get insight into her intentions for the project and the Anacostia community. Tactile Anacostia was an opportunity to acknowledge the changes happening in Anacostia by inviting long time residents to share their stories, relating to food and Anacostia, with each other, new residents and visitors. Carmen took the stories a step further by capturing the stories (metaphorically speaking) in jars that participants then took home. By taking something home Carmen said, “it means that the artwork continues to work beyond the here and now, which is what I feel constitutes ephemeral art.”

Tactile Anacostia was chosen as a precedent for several reasons. First, it illustrates public art beyond traditional notions of what public art can be. The public art takes on the form of conversation, memories, and connections between people. The designer asked Carmen how she defends projects such as Tactile Anacostia as art and not just asocial project. She expressed that, “by maintaining a framework of control over the processes of my projects, I maintain the role of the artist. I see myself



as the director that allows enough freedom for the narrative of the actors to shine and then interpret and recreate the narratives into my own vision as the artist.” The second reason is that the project found a way to preserve and nurture Anacostia’s history and at the same time recognize that the community is changing. While the design goal of the thesis is geared towards the existing community, the designer recognizes the value and importance of dialogue and conversation between new and existing residents during revitalization. The designer has already observed the tensions between the two groups. Existing residents feel that the changes coming are going to disrupt their community and new residents feel apprehensive in how to engage with Anacostia’s community culture. In order for new residents and stakeholders to support the existing community, they have to feel comfortable with learning and participating in the culture. Therefore, the design must provide opportunities for the two groups to share ideas, values, and learn new skills and talents from one another.

## Chapter 3: Contextual Background

This chapter explores Anacostia's past and present to identify major events that have and will shape the landscape, demographics, and urban form. Classified as a historic neighborhood, Anacostia resides in the Southwest quadrant (Ward 8) of Washington D.C. It is often used incorrectly to refer to all neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River, however Anacostia is just one neighborhood within Ward 8. The focus of this thesis is on Anacostia but Ward 8 neighborhoods are connected by social networks that blur the neighborhood boundary lines.

### Site Selection

The designer chose Anacostia for the thesis after working with Ward 8 youth in a two-week design charrette in July 2012. The youth were part of the Mayors Summer Youth Employment Program, charged with the task of brainstorming ideas for the types of activities that will go on the proposed 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Park. At the end of two weeks, their final product was a scaled 3D model of their ideas that they presented to the director of the D.C. Office of Planning and other city government professionals. Over the two weeks the designer picked up on the following issues and concerns raised by the youth:

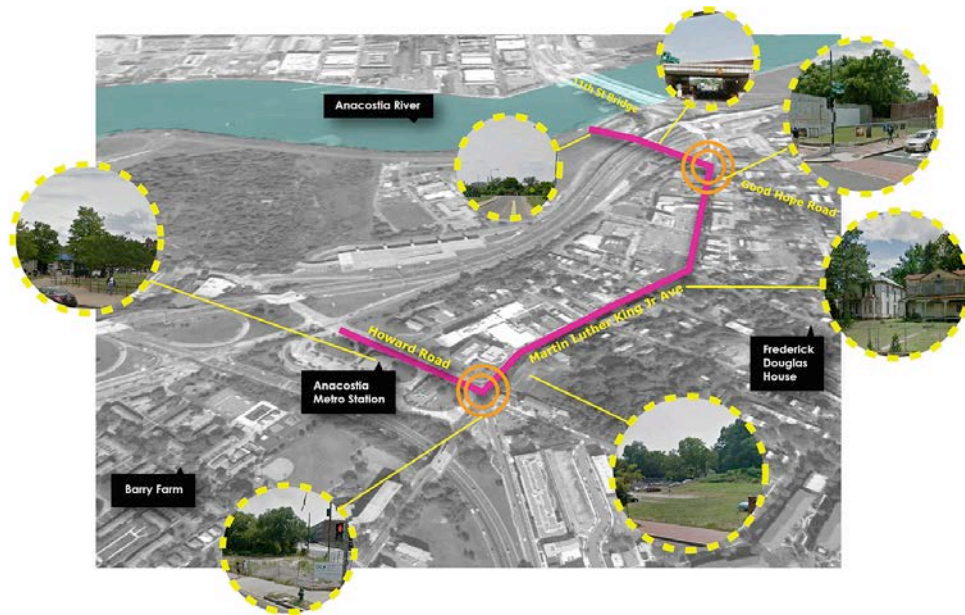
- Concern over resident displacement by the increase in economic development throughout Ward 8.
- A disconnect between youth and the surrounding natural environment. Many never have visited the Anacostia River.
- A lack of interest in the historical context of Anacostia. Many did not know who Frederick Douglass was.
- A lack of interaction between younger and older generations.
- The lack of activities in the neighborhood for engaging the creativity of the youth.

The designer saw an opportunity to rethink the role of designers, such as landscape architects, in urban revitalization, particularly in disenfranchised communities.

Seven potential sites were identified for public art based on the following criteria:

- Site is located within the Business Improvement District (BID), which allows residents to explore strategies for community engagement during revitalization.
- Site is located on underutilized or vacant land with the purpose of rethinking these spaces as resources for the community rather than empty/dead space.
- Site is located where there is high pedestrian activity in order to involve as many people as possible.
- Site compliments future initiatives and plans for Anacostia to obtain support financially and/or politically.

The designer initially envisioned a network of public art installations spanning the chosen path that is illustrated in Figure 9 as a way to highlight and stitch together community resources and assets --which together comprise the community identity-- as a strategy to root people to place. After revisiting the thesis design goals and considering the amount of time allotted to complete the design, the designer chose only one of the seven proposed site locations. Designing for one site will allow for greater design detail and provide the opportunity to create a neighborhood “center” that facilitates civic dialogue, local attachments, a sense of community, and local identity. The proximity of the site to one of the gateway nodes into Historic Anacostia makes it a key site for visitors arriving into the community. The site is a .92 acre vacant lot, owned by Matthews Baptist Memorial Church adjacent to the site, located adjacent to the site (Figure 10). Ultimately, the site is slated for redevelopment for a mixed-use building. A temporary, multi-functional, public art design is proposed to create experiences that highlight the identity of the Anacostia community.



**Figure 9: Potential Locations for Public Art Installations**



**Figure 10: Chosen Site**

## History

The many threads of Anacostia's rich and complex history cannot begin to be fully explored in this thesis. Instead, a brief overview of key points in time, highlighting past social and land developments in order to help build a framework for understanding Anacostia's present fabric.

The name Anacostia comes from the Anglicized name of a Nacochtank Native American settlement situated along the riverbanks as early as 10,000 years ago.

Today the Anacostine Indian culture remains largely unexplored, with evidence of it destroyed or buried under the Blue Plains sewage treatment plant and runways of Bolling Air Force Base.

The core of what is now the Anacostia historic district, incorporated in 1854 as Uniontown, was a whites-only residential subdivision, and one of the first suburbs in the District of Columbia. The new subdivision developed by John Fox, John Van Hook and John Dobler was positioned on a 240-acre farm and was set up for white workers at the Navy Yard, conveniently located across the river.

When slavery was abolished in the District of Columbia on April 16, 1862, many newly emancipated slaves sought protection and housing. Barry's Farm, adjacent to Anacostia, was a community planned to enable freedmen to become homeowners. In 1867 the Freedmen's Bureau purchased a 375-acre tract of land purchased from James D. Barry. Freedmen were hired to do the initial site-development work, clearing land and cutting roads for a daily wage of \$1.25. Part of these wages could be set aside toward purchase of a lot. The cleared land was subdivided into one-acre lots and sold to purchasers with enough lumber to build a

small house. The 1870 census shows that many of the residents were skilled workers whose occupations were blacksmith, carpenter, shoemaker, bricklayer, and house painter. By 1880, occupations such as government clerk, teacher, midwife, dressmaker, grocer, sign painter, and wheelwright had been added to the list of occupations. In 1877 the community's name Barry's Farm officially changed to Hillsdale (Anacostia Historic Association). In 1877, the antislavery activist and statesman Frederick Douglass purchased the house built by John Van Hook, one of the original developers of Uniontown. The house sat on a hill that overlooked the Uniontown subdivision, and was named Cedar Hill.

The end of the Second World War spurred a population increase and suburbanization across the United States, which in Anacostia, created conditions that ultimately led to poverty, crime, and economic and political disinvestment. Until the late 1950s and early 1960s, Anacostia's population had remained predominantly European-American, with whites comprising 87 percent of the population (Anacostia Historic Association). In the decades that followed, however, the demographics radically shifted to more than 80 percent African American. These demographic changes coincided with the larger federal government project known as "urban renewal", beginning with the Housing Act of 1949. Urban renewal projects were designed to provide the money for retooling the city, clear blighted neighborhoods, and help the community transition from a war footing to a postwar era.

The term "urban renewal" was used generically to refer to improvements in cities, but in the United States such improvements resulted in the displacement and oppression of many low-income populations. For instance, the Federal Highway

Program furthered the separation between low-income and medium to high-income neighborhoods. In the 1960s the Anacostia Freeway (I-295) was constructed, imposing a barrier between the east and west city quadrants. The highway created a new option for mobility and spurred the flight of much of the middle-class out of Anacostia to newer housing in the postwar suburbs. In Anacostia, new public housing projects developed to serve minority populations from adjacent neighborhoods, such as Barry Farm, which became home for many African Americans displaced by urban renewal projects. The mechanisms of urban renewal projects worked synergistically to create a new image for neighborhoods east of the river, both in terms of the physical environment and demographic makeup. Part of the aim of this project is to highlight and strengthen Anacostia's social networks strained by these developments, and which continue to be under threat today.

In her book *Root Shock: How tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It*, Mindy Fullilove, Professor of Clinical Psychiatry and Public Health at Columbia University, looks at the effect of urban renewal on black neighborhoods across the country. According to Fullilove, the federal Housing Act of 1949 left African-Americans at an enormous social, economic and emotional disadvantage. Fullilove defines "root shock" as "the traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one's emotional ecosystem." (Fullilove 2012). The disrupted context, exterior to the individual and the group, is the fundamental process that engenders root shock. At the level of the individual, a profound emotional upheaval "destroys the working model of the world that had existed in the individual's head" (Fullilove 2012). The experience of losing one's roots and the

overlapping networks that existed in small black communities: the corner stores, shared gardens, neighbors watching neighbors kids, she notes, “does not end with emergency treatment, but will stay with the individuals for a lifetime.”

The upheaval of people and social networks due to urban renewal and the concentration of the displaced communities east of the Anacostia River continue to be felt by residents. The conditions of Anacostia physically and emotionally are a result of poor design and lack of maintenance of the public housing system, and disinvestment in a community by the city-- socially, economically, and politically. In addition, four decades of having the highest crime rate in the city—particularly due to the drugtrade, which reached its peak in the 1990s-- continues to rupture the community fabric. The long-term implications of the city’s disinvestment have left many residents without a sense of ownership, voice, and choice in the decision-making process of redevelopment, which has led to distrust between black communities and government agencies.

The events discussed above represent only a fraction of Anacostia, and are a textbook history of a landscape and it’s people. What will happen to the stories that did not make it into text? The goal of this thesis is to provide opportunities for people to reveal their untold stories- the stories that shape community identity and root people to place.



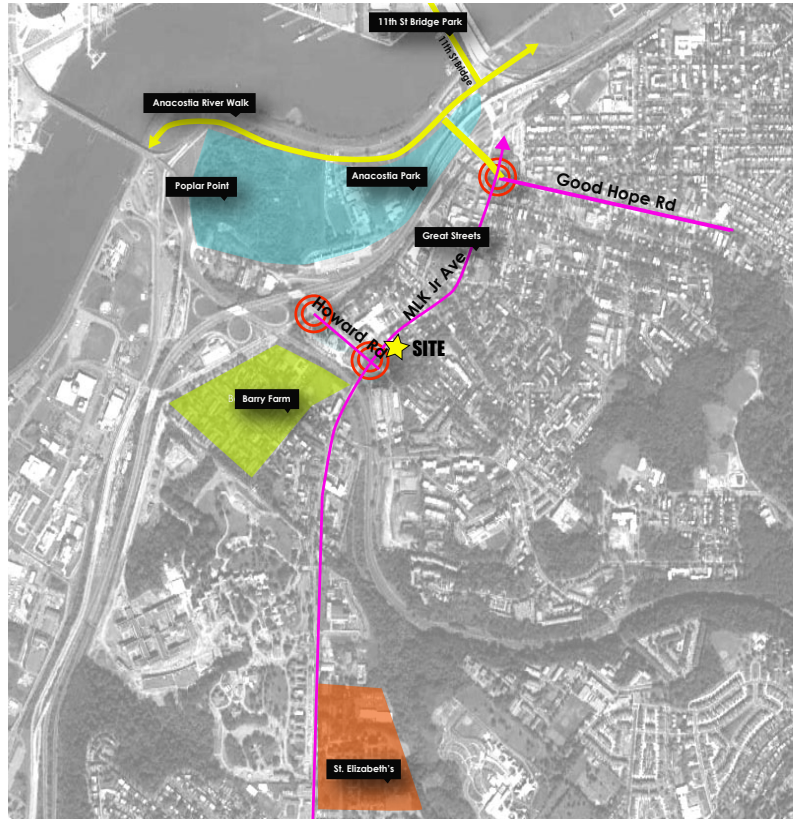
### Demographics

The combined effects of economic and social disruption triggered a long period of economic and population decline. Today, Anacostia is once again in the midst of transition. Currently, approximately 93 percent of the area's population is African American, which is significantly higher than the citywide average of 60 percent; only one percent of the area's residents are of Hispanic origin and less than two percent are foreign born. The 2010 census shows that the area has a significantly younger population with over 37 percent of the population under the age of 18, which is 17 percent higher than the District average; of the 4700 residents, less than 700 people are over the age of 65. The median household income is \$29,700 with 44 percent of households below \$25,000, which are considerably below the District median of \$58,100. Land ownership is low with currently only 28 percent of home ownership, the majority of the population renting single-family homes or apartments, consisting of the highest number of government-assisted vouchers in the city. Nearly one in six housing units are vacant and more than one in three residents live in poverty. The crime rate and unemployment rates remain chronically high and are well above the city and regional average.

### *Redevelopment and Anacostia*

The District of Columbia has been experiencing urban revitalization and redevelopment for the past two decades, with billions of dollars in new investments in its downtown, neighborhoods and along its waterfront. Anacostia is located within five miles of the City's economic hub, and yet for decades is among the most impoverished part of the city due to decades of political and economic disinvestment.

Anacostia and surrounding neighborhoods are the focus of numerous small and large-scale initiatives (Figure 11). These include major long-term planning proposal such as the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, introduction of a \$40 million light-rail transit system, neighborhood focused initiatives, building projects such as the Government Centers Initiative, redevelopment of St. Elizabeth's, Barry Farm redevelopment, and short-term projects such as facade and streetscape improvements along MLK Jr. Avenue and Good Hope Road, all of which are expected to catalyze additional private sector investment throughout the area.



**Figure 11: Location of Redevelopment Initiatives Relative to Site**

These patterns of revitalization and reinvestment are redrawing the civic and community fabric of the city. Anacostia’s proximity to the waterfront gives the area a greater significance and momentum for redevelopment. The District’s 2006 Comprehensive Plan envisions the revitalization of Anacostia and vicinity as a “vibrant urban village” offering diversity of goods, services, employment and mixed-use residential opportunities. The numerous small and large-scale plans and initiatives have provided a framework for the vision of Ward 8 neighborhoods.

Redevelopment efforts are targeting newcomers to include single young professionals and families, attracted to the neighborhood thanks to the low-home prices and park and school improvements. The plans for transformation indicate that

residents displaced from their homes have the ability to return to a new mixed-income development. One of the many caveats to residence returning is that they have good credit and have no criminal record, which leaves out many people from returning.

Contact with the community during redevelopment is usually partial to those individuals who are already active in the systems attempting to improve the area--concerned citizens, active representatives and council members. Unfortunately, the individuals whom designers also need to engage with would never step foot in a community planning meeting. An overarching goal for this thesis is that the proposed design ensures opportunities for not only active community members, who have a voice in the redevelopment process, but also for those who usually do not have a voice in such matters—people who might otherwise lie outside the mainstream of society.

### Public Art and Anacostia

The District's Comprehensive Plan<sup>2</sup> (2006) outlines goals, objectives, and policies that will help “create a new civic and community fabric comprised of a network of new and revitalized places that are capturing the many pulses of the dynamic city”. *The Art and Culture Element* of the Comprehensive Plan acknowledges the contribution of the arts to the city's economy and supports investment in the arts in order to provide new jobs, goods, and services. In 2008, the D.C. Commissions on the Art and Humanities put forth the Public Art Master Plan for DC Creates!<sup>3</sup> as a comprehensive review of the City's public art program and recommendations for its future. The plan establishes a framework for how artworks can be related to the ways in which the city is building its future. The plan outlines opportunities for projects that can achieve these goals, sets out criteria for prioritizing projects, and outlines strategies for the ongoing partnerships and operational changes that will catalyze this new generation of artworks.

DC Creates! focuses on three broad categories of projects. This thesis proposes a design that addresses the plan's goal of “Art that is Woven into the District's Civic and Community Fabric”. The public artworks in this category should provide the following outcomes<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> The plan is a general policy document that provides overall guidance for future planning and development of the city. D.C. Office of Planning

<sup>3</sup> DC Creates! purchases, commissions and installs artworks for public sites throughout the District of Columbia. The program was established by legislation that allocates up to one percent of the city's adjusted capital budget for commissioning and acquiring artwork. The program is under the umbrella of the District Commission on the Arts and Humanities, which reports to the city's Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development.

<sup>4</sup> DC Creates! Public Art Master Plan, <http://dcarts.dc.gov/service/public-art-collections>

- Enliven places that define the spirit and life of places that people of many neighborhoods share, places that anchor individual communities.
- Create networks of places that inspire people to explore areas of the city that they are not familiar with, and build a sense of connections among the wards and neighborhoods.
- Contribute to efforts which create neighborhoods that are livable and walkable, places that reveal the city's hidden history and culture and that speak of the vitality of the city and its future.
- Enrich people's everyday experience of moving about the city by creating a sense of surprise, new reference points, and connections to layers of the city's history and culture.

Figure 12 outlines several initiatives and plans that are proposed or currently taking place in Anacostia and surrounding neighborhoods that contribute to the City's vision of creating a new civic and urban fabric. Each initiative contains a public art component that use art as a mechanism to preserve cultural heritage, celebrate history of place and people, enhance wayfinding and neighborhood gateways, and introduce vibrancy and creative aesthetics into a neighborhood. After reviewing each of the initiatives outlined below, the designer felt that critical pieces of information were missing from these plans: How will these public art projects benefit the existing community? How will the community contribute to these projects? This is an opportunity for this thesis to answer the WHO? WHAT? And WHERE? The hope is that by answering these questions that this design thesis can contribute and collaborate with future and current public art initiatives taking place in Anacostia.

## City Redevelopment Initiatives, Anacostia, & Public Art

Initiatives and Plans	Established	Agenda	Agency	Public Art
Comprehensive Plan Creative D.C. Agenda	2006	<p>Outlines goals, objectives, and policies that will help "create a new civic and community fabric comprised of a network of new and revitalized places that are capturing the many pulses of the dynamic city."</p> <p>Purforth by D.C. Office of Planning, geared towards promoting revitalization and enlivening underserved areas while creating a more distinctive sense of place through the arts and creative industry.</p>	DMPED OP	The Art and Culture Element of the plan acknowledges the contribution of the arts to the city's economy and supports investment in the arts in order to provide new jobs, goods, and services.
Great Streets Initiative	2006	A multi-agency effort to transform underinvested commercial corridors into a thriving and inviting neighborhood centers.	DMPED OP DDOT	Opportunity to work with local businesses to implement public art.
Anacostia Transit Area Strategic Investment and Development	2008	The plan envisions the revitalization of Anacostia and vicinity as a vibrant urban village offering a diversity of goods, services, employment and residential opportunities.	OP	City agencies will work with community members and organizations, local artists and cultural resources to promote Anacostia as a cultural destination and available location for creative arts studios and residences.
Greening Americas Capital	2008	Partnership between the U.S. EPA, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the U.S. Department of Transportation for creating sustainable communities. Their goal is to help state capitals develop and implement a vision of distinctive, environmentally friendly neighborhoods that incorporate innovative green building and green infrastructure strategies.	EPA HUD DOT	Wayfinding for visitors and new users at the Anacostia metro is poor and could be improved.  The community wants to celebrate the history of the neighborhood and can use public art to do so.
Barry Farms Redevelopment	2006	Consistent with the New Communities Initiative, the goal of this effort is to transform the public and low income housing development and its neighborhood into a mixed-income, mixed-use community.	OP HUD DDOT	The history of the community is proposed to be commemorated through a placard and monument system located at key spots within in the neighborhood. These can be linked through a Walking Tour Program for the larger Anacostia community.
Anacostia Waterfront Initiative	2003	The initiative envisions a mixed-use network of residential space, offices, shopping, parks, trails, recreational areas, and historic sites, along the Anacostia River. Transforming the Anacostia to become the center of the 21st century as the City redefines its image, identity, and growth pattern.	DDOT OP DMPED DDOE EPA NPS AWS ECC	Temporary art should be considered in areas where long-term improvements may be scheduled but few short-term improvements are anticipated.  Public art for cultural heritage
National Park Service (NPS) Office of the Mayor/Deputy Mayor for Economic Development (DMPED) Office of Planning (OP)		<p>Housing and Urban Development (HUD)</p> <p>Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Department of Transportation (DOT)</p>	<p>Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS)</p> <p>Earth Conservation Corps (ECC)</p> <p>District Department of Transportation (DDOT)</p>	

Figure 12: Initiatives and Plans for Anacostia and Neighborhoods East of the River

The ARCH Development Corporation (ADC) is a small neighborhood-based organization focusing on the economic regeneration of the Historic Community of Anacostia using the arts, culture and the creative economy to support new businesses. ADC operates the following programs to showcase artist services and cultural organizations: Honfleur Gallery, The Gallery at Vivid Solutions, and the Anacostia Arts Center. These galleries represents local (all D.C. Wards), National and foreign based visual artists with works ranging from painting and mixed media to photography. The designer has had opportunities to talk with many local Ward 8 artists through Ward 8 Art and Culture Council meetings and events for the past year. The over all consensus is that support from ADC programs of local artists and local creativity is disproportionately represented compared to non-local artists. The Ward 8 Art and Culture Council is actively trying to provide a platform and support system for not only Ward 8 artists, but avenues to codify new creative talents of the community. Figure 13 illustrates current public art throughout Anacostia, which consists of murals and an installation. The proposed design is attempting to create a platform for Anacostia's artists to express themselves and work with the Ward 8 Arts and Culture Council to support these efforts.





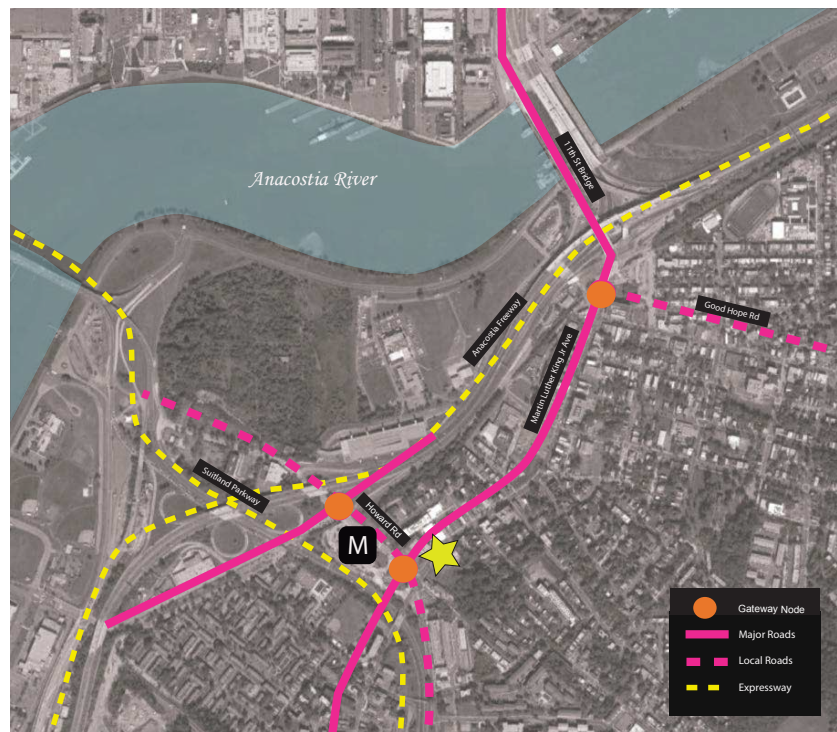
Figure 13: Public art in Anacostia

## Chapter 4: Site Inventory and Analysis

This chapter examines the various physical and behavioral elements and patterns that are unique to the area of study. Immersion into the Anacostia community allowed for an in depth understanding of the physical and social character of the neighborhood. Some visits were specific to site observation, which included a variety of techniques of mapping, taking photos, sketching and diagramming, and observing the behaviors of people. Other visits included informal interviews and participating in community meetings and events. The following sections provide the identification and analysis of features that give Anacostia and the community its overall distinctive characteristic.

### Site Location

Anacostia lies within a half-mile radius east of the Anacostia River. Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue (MLK Jr. Ave.) and Good Hope Road make up the North and East boundaries of Anacostia, and serve as the neighborhood's commercial corridor. The residential Howard Road is the boundary to the West and Fort Stanton Park is the boundary to the south. For the purpose of this thesis, MLK Jr. Ave, Howard Rd, and Good Hope Rd. are referred to as the main roads throughout the paper (Figure 14). The site chosen for this thesis is situated at the corner of MLK Jr. Ave. and Howard Rd., one of the major nodes and gateways into Historic Anacostia (Figure 15).



**Figure 14: Vehicular Circulation Relative to Site Location**



**Figure 15: View from Gateway Node-MLK Jr Ave and Howard Rd**

## Land Use

Anacostia is predominantly a residential community. Consisting of a mix of single- and multifamily residences. Houses within the historic district of Anacostia are subject to adherence to certain historic restoration standards. Barry Farm, the neighborhood adjacent to Anacostia includes apartment buildings set in landscaped courtyards. Both neighborhoods feature building heights of one to three stories, giving the neighborhood moderate density and human scale (Figure 16).



**Figure 16: Housing Typologies**

The designer sees an opportunity to reference the materials and architecture of the buildings in design elements and structures. For example, new meaning and function can be given to the wrought iron bars that are characteristic of building windows; old doors and window frames from abandoned historic homes; and materials such as brick, stone, and wood; the possibilities are endless it just requires looking at things from a new perspective.

The MLK Jr. Ave. commercial corridor is the historic center of Anacostia. Currently the corridor is spotted with retail, institutional uses and churches. Most commercial entities are built in row home structures; several buildings are abandoned and stand desolate while others are retrofitted for new uses. The limited retail is insufficient in providing shopping opportunities for the neighborhood. Residents must travel outside their neighborhood to shop, eat, and even find basic services like grocery stores. Resident's are welcoming of new commercial amenities but express that they need to fit in the context of the neighborhood, such as being affordable,



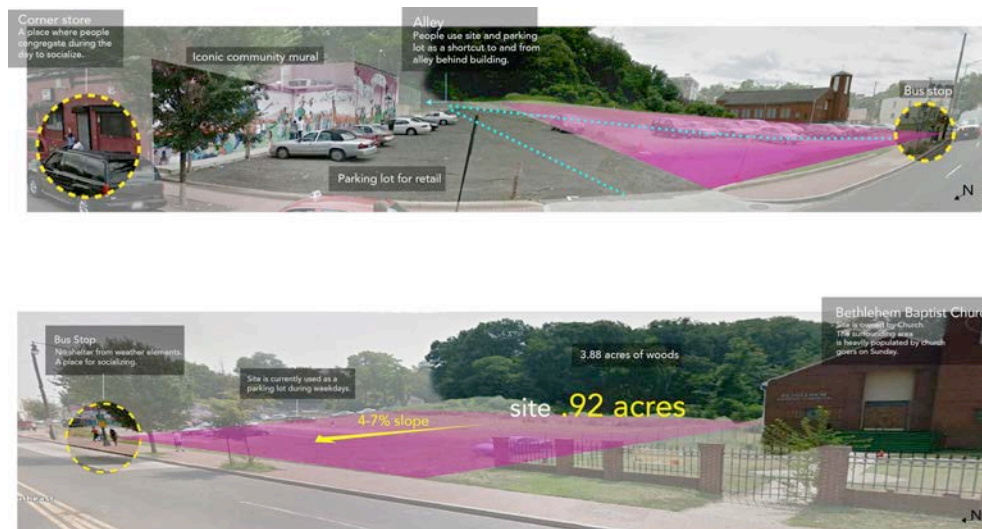
respond to resident needs, and support Ward 8 business owners and entrepreneurs.

Figure 17 shows the surrounding land use relative to the site, which consist of low to medium-density housing, churches, schools, local businesses, and the Anacostia Metro.



**Figure 17: Land Use Adjacent to Site**

Currently, the site is used as a parking lot by school and church staff during the weekdays. The designer will propose alternative options for parking in order to explore the entire site's possibilities so the design is not limited by the constraint of weekday parking. Pedestrians use the site as a short cut from the MLK Jr. Ave. to the alley located NE of the site (Figure 18). The final design will provide a path to support this shortcut.



**Figure 18: Site Use**

Walking and public transportation are primary forms of transportation for residents and workers. The Anacostia Metro is a major transportation hub and is expected to increase in ridership as the area develops into mixed-use neighborhoods. Bus stops running along the commercial corridor and are heavily populated. Despite the lack of seating and cover structure the stops are prime locations for social interactions. The bus stop adjacent to the site is heavily used on a daily basis especially in the morning and afternoon during school hours (Figure 19). Currently, there is only one bench and no shelter. There is an opportunity to extend the site to provide the needed shelter and additional seating.



**Figure 19: Bus Stop Adjacent to Site**

The closest park is Anacostia Park, within a half-mile radius of MLK. Jr. Ave, between Howard Rd. and Good Hope Rd, however, no formal pedestrian trail exists to this area of the park. Pedestrians must walk under the freeway to enter the park. The three schools along MLK Jr.Ave.: Excel Academy, Thurgood Marshall Charter School, and Savoy Elementary do not have adequate playground equipment or playfields. The only basketball court lies in Barry Farm, a neighborhood adjacent to Anacostia (Figure 20). On one occasion, the designer observed a group of kids playing basketball using the trashcan at the corner of intersection as the basketball hoop. The resident's have expressed the need for a safe place for kids to play. The request for intergenerational spaces was also brought to the attention of the designer as a way to bridge the disconnection between generations.



**Figure 20: Parks and Recreation Centers Relative to the Site**

### *Built Environment*

The disinvestment in social and economic needs continues to affect the area's physical environment. The high frequency of littering is a significant problem along the major roads, even though trash receptacles are located at each bus stop, intersection, and outside some of the retail shops. During storm events trash flows into the storm gutters and ultimately into the Anacostia River. A quick survey of the type of trash shows that the majority is food related-glass/plastic bottles, chip/candy wrapping, Styrofoam, and paper. The chosen site is an open, bare lot spotted with liquor bottles, candy/chip wrappers, plastic and glass bottles, campaign signs and cigarette butts (Figure 21).





**Figure 21: Site Texture**

One resident expressed that a factor that contributes to this problem is that people don't have ownership of where they live so they don't feel a responsibility to maintain the landscape. Many public art projects have turned the problem of trash into functional objects. There is an opportunity to reuse trash for artwork and functional uses on the site.

The streetscape appearance is indicative of the lack of maintenance. Attractive red brick paving is used to delineate crosswalks and sidewalks, yet uneven bricks due to settlement, pose safety hazards for pedestrians. Deep potholes mar the roads, which residents pointed out have not been fixed for years.

Despite the initial appearance of the built environment, there is a lot of texture and character to the neighborhood. A closer look into the built environment the designer observes the many layers that make up the community. The shapes and materials of the built environment provide inspiration for the design (Figure 22).



**Figure 22: Neighborhood Texture**

### *Natural Environment*

The Anacostia River is the backbone of Anacostia, yet buildings and highway infrastructure sever a connection between the neighborhood and river. Historically the river has separated the communities east of the river from the monumental core of the capital city. This has led to social, economic, and political disparities between those who live west and those who live east of the river. Heavy pollution in the river, weak investment, and development along its banks are attributed to it becoming what many refer to as “D.C.’s forgotten river.” However, in recent years, private and public organizations, local businesses, citizens and the D.C., Maryland and federal governments have collaborated in efforts to reduce its pollution levels to make the river “swimmable and fishable” by 2032. While working with the youth on the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge project, it became evident to the designer that there is a disconnection between residents and the river, particularly the youth who did not want to get near the waters edge, scared of the pollution associated with the river. The designer sees an

opportunity to integrate aspects of the Anacostia River into the design as an educational tool.

The watershed that drains into Anacostia covers hundreds of acres and sends runoff, both overland and in storm drains, into the Anacostia River. During storm events flooding at the bottom of the site becomes an issue (Figure 23).

Implementation of a rain garden can mitigate the flooding problem; act as an educational tool addressing stormwater issues; and increase habitat diversity on the site.

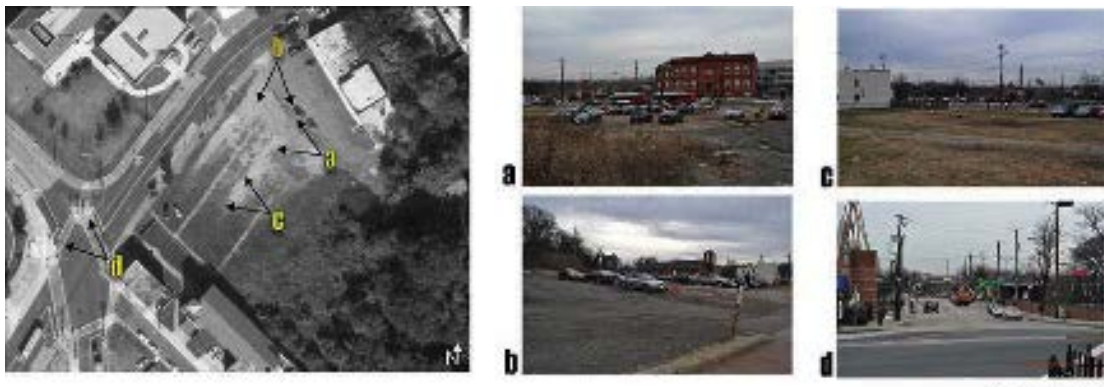


**Figure 23: Flooding Issue on Site (Data source GIS)**

The site shows evidence of a neglected landscape. Due to the heavy use of the lot as a parking lot for so many years, a patchwork of grass, weeds, gravel, and asphalt make the majority of the site surface impervious. Due to the poor soil quality the design must find alternative ways to introduce vegetation such as trees and plants. There is an opportunity to build structures that act functionally and aesthetically to support plant and tree growth.

The topography east of the river provides expansive vistas of the city. Standing at the corner of MLK Jr. Ave. and Howard Rd, beyond the highway, a view of the Washington Monument and Capital silhouettes decorate the skyline (Figure 24).

Unfortunately, buildings are blocking that same view from the site. The 12 ft. elevation change throughout the site does allow for changes in view; highpoints on the site provide vistas that connect the neighborhood to the rest of the city Figure. There is a gentle slope ranging between 4-7%. . It is important for the designer to maintain these expansive vistas of the city and create opportunities through design elements to highlight the views.



**Figure 24: View sheds From Site (Google Maps)**

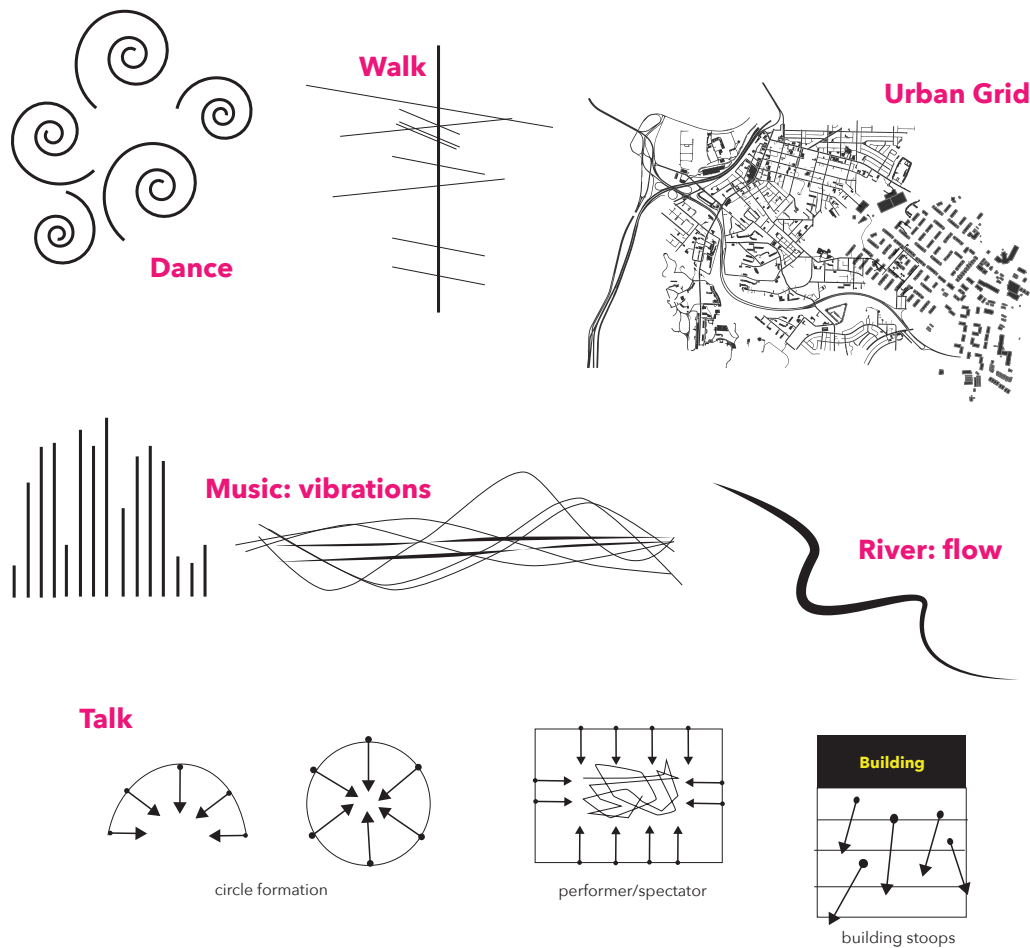
The 3.92 acres of wooded area directly east of the site is unmanaged, consisting of invasive plant species and dead trees (Figure 25). There is an opportunity to engage and highlight the woods into the design.



**Figure 25: Woods Located Adjacent and NE of Site**

### Human Activity

How people currently use and move through space and consideration of future use is a key consideration in the design process. Immersion into the community has provided the designer an awareness of the strong social networks that exist, as well as the daily patterns of interaction between people within the community. Anacostia is a neighborhood where most people know one another through daily activities. Running into acquaintances on the street, socializing with neighbors on stoops, sidewalks and corner stores, listening to music on front porches, children playing in courtyards, and watching friends play basketball at the Barry Farm courts are ways people use outdoor space in the community on a daily basis. The configuration of bodies in space is illustrated conceptually in Figure 26. The way people move through the neighborhood is a point for inspiration for the design.



**Figure 26: Movement and Interaction**

Located at the corner of MLK Jr. Ave. and Howard Rd., the site is positioned within a busy intersection that supports institutional, transit, and retail activity. The three schools surrounding the site create significant pedestrian activity in the morning and the afternoon as children make their way to school and home again. Students utilize the sidewalk, stoops, stairs and newsstands while they socialize. Currently there are no plazas or open spaces that support such activities. On several occasion, around 10 am, the designer noticed the same group of kids, ages 3-5, walking past the



site. On one of the site visits the designer stopped the woman walking the kids to ask where they go on these excursions. Directly South of the site is a preschool, and due to inadequate space for an outdoor playground they walk the kids up and down MLK Jr. Ave. The woman expressed the need for an outdoor play area because the daycare currently does not have outdoor space.

Not all human interaction in Anacostia and surrounding neighborhoods is positive. Crime and gang activity such as drugs, fights, and turf wars are a continuous problem. The researcher witnessed first hand the impact such involvement has on the youth. During the two-week charrette the youth were required to interview residents throughout Anacostia. One boy could not participate in this activity due to his concern that he would cross into a rival gang's territory a couple blocks down from the workshop location. Assuring a safe place for people at all times is an important factor for the design. The following chapter delves deeper into the human fabric.

### *Anacostia's Community Identity*

The designer approached the task of site inventory with the ultimate goal of understanding what shaped Anacostia's community identity. There were four questions that were continuously referred to during the investigation: What brings people together? What forms social bonds? What makes the neighborhood and community unique? What is important to the community? The process of analysis and interpretation of the site inventory involved critical analysis and creative insight in order to gain an understanding of Anacostia's community identity. The analysis and interpretation of the data assembled and brought order to the raw material, such as

quotes, notes, and documents in order to organize the data into patterns and basic descriptions. Because of the large amount of data collected over the past year, data reduction was essential in the analysis stage and was narrowed down to information that answered the four questions defined at the beginning of the investigation.

The form and content of the design is not about a single organization but about the layering of several frameworks and weaves together the following aspects of Anacostia's community identity that have resulted from the site analysis:

- **Existing resources and assets**
- **Physical texture of the neighborhood: materials, form, shape, color**
- **Movement and interaction through space**
- **Needs, concerns, and values of the community**

#### *Existing Resources and Assets*

Anacostia has a diversity of potential resources available to them through local businesses, schools, nonprofit organizations, public institutions, the faith community, and their own residents. On their own they reach only a small portion of the community. Figure 27 conceptually maps out the resources and assets the designer identified through immersion in the culture over the past year. A central core is needed to tie them together so that more people can leverage these resources. Creating partnerships with local resources such as businesses and community organizations is critical for the success of the proposed community-based public art design. The design proposes that the community maintain and manage the space, therefore the design's programming needs to support these resources. Integrating



these resources in the design also provides people with an understanding of the unique assets that exist in the community and encourage a dialogue about how to best leverage them during this time of transformation.



**Figure 27: Resources and Assets (Conceptual Representation)**

Charles Wilson, an active community member and resident of Anacostia expressed, “ Anyone who has lived in Anacostia, or Ward 8, for any amount of time knows that Ward 8 has the most color, character, and sound in the district. There are so many people doing great things and I want to be able to highlight the positive and talk about the negative. It’s time that the misconceptions are corrected and we as residents are the ones to do it.” The designer identified what residents felt were major assets of the community: history, local knowledge and wisdom, the Anacostia River, Go-Go music, community gatherings (cookouts, Barry Farm Basketball games, festivals, music events), community spirit, and the skills/talents of the people. The design elements and programming will provide a creative outlet for people to share and express these assets that already exist within the community.

### *Needs and Concerns*

Immersion into the community has provided the designer with feedback on the needs and concerns that community members continuously expressed (Figure 28). The following table outlines the most common needs and concerns followed by subsequent potential solutions. Many residents expressed that resources (information pertaining to community events, meetings, activities, and services) are fragmented. The pastor of Matthews Memorial Church suggested, “There needs to be better communication between organizations, residents, and businesses so we can form partnerships with one another and move forward in the changes that are happening in Anacostia. Many people feel that there needs to be a place where we can all come together for a common purpose.” The re-appropriation of the vacant lot into a place that responds to the community needs and concerns provides a common space for the community. Some of the issues cannot be directly addressed on the site, but the design can support and provide a platform for a conversation to take place addressing how to solve these issues.

	Problem	Solution
<b>SOCIAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crime and youth delinquency</li> <li>• Resources are fragemented               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• confusion of when and where community events are aking place</li> <li>• resources aren't easily accessible to all residents</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Characterized as a food desert</li> <li>• Local artists feel underrepresented</li> <li>• Lack adequate parks and social gathering spaces</li> <li>• Generational gap               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• older generation feel a disrespect from younger generations</li> <li>• youth don't have a good sense of their historical background</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for after school activites</li> <li>• Create safe environment</li> <li>• Centralize resources</li> <li>• Provide healthy food options</li> <li>• Support local artists</li> <li>• Create a center for community activites</li> <li>• Facilitate bridging generational gap</li> </ul>
<b>ENVIRONMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disconnection to Anacostia River               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• highway is a physical barrier to River</li> <li>• negative image of River (trash and chemical pollution)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Trash pollution               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in River and throughout the neighborhood</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Disconnection with nature               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sparse urban tree canopy</li> <li>• minimal habitat diversity</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide educational opportunities</li> <li>• Rethink trash as a resource</li> <li>• Enhance habitat diversity</li> </ul>
<b>ECONOMIC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of job opportunities for residents               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• residents want workforce development</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Vacant homes and lots               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Due to decades of economic disinvestment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create opportunities to share and learn new skills</li> <li>• Utilize vacant space in transition to support community needs and wants.</li> </ul>

**Figure 28: Community Needs and Concerns**

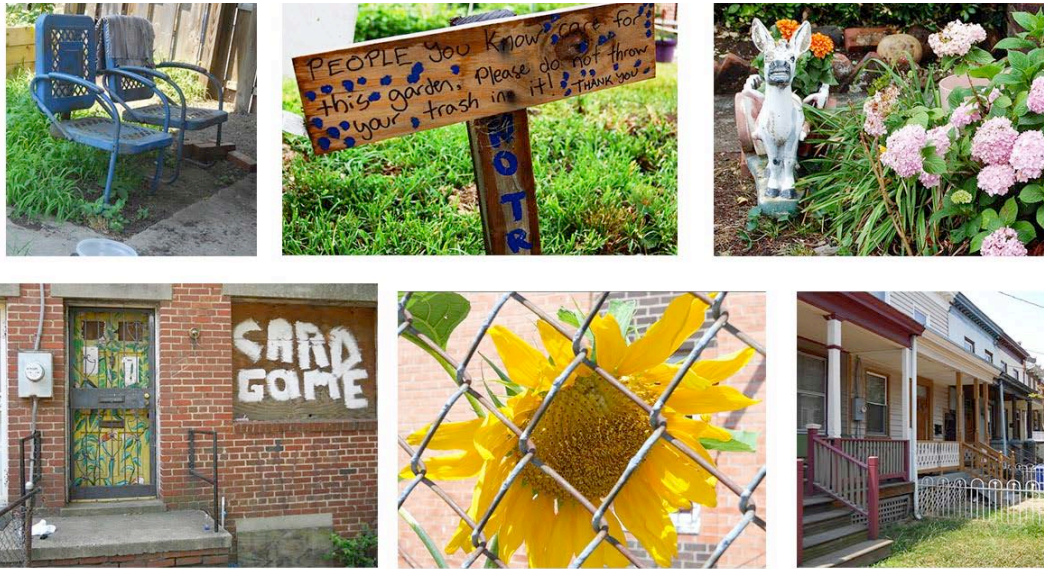
### *Movement and Interaction*

Socialization among community members is an important part of daily life in Anacostia. The residents have traditions and rituals of using public space that have inspired the design to reinforce the relationship between people and place. The Anacostia neighborhood consists of lived and felt spaces of everyday life known through its associated images, non-verbal communication, rituals, movement, businesses, and other aspects of life at street level.

The designer has made an effort to capture movement through space and how people arrange themselves in space in order to gain inspiration for how the design can support those movements (Figure 26, pg. 71).

### Physical Texture of the Neighborhood

Anacostia is a neighborhood filled with hidden treasures when it comes to the materials, shapes, colors, and forms of the built environment. The physical texture is a product of how people move and interact with their built environment. Figure 29 illustrates the multi-faceted texture that begins to tell a story about the people and community.



**Figure 29: Neighborhood Texture - Narrative**

The design proposes the reuse and repurpose of material such as: chain linked fence, brick, doors, windows, cast-iron fences, etc. to encourage a dialogue between people and their relationship to the physical environment (Figure 30). Finding and using local vestiges of the existing neighborhood grounds the future in the experiences and associations with the physical environment of the community. This makes the future not only recognizable, but also a matter of identity and pride.



**Figure 30: Neighborhood Texture - Materials**

### **Site Analysis**

The site analysis (Figure 31) summarizes the key opportunities and constraints of the site that were based on existing site conditions (i.e. topography, hydrology, vegetation), existing site use (pedestrian and vehicular use), and the site's relationship to its direct relationship to surrounding context (i.e. buildings, road, parking lot, and sidewalk). Figure 31 acts as a template in which the four aspects of community identity, described above, are woven into.





## Chapter 5: Design Goals and Response

The visualization of community identity is proposed as community-based public art that takes its form through the physical framework of the design and the experiences created through movement and interaction throughout the site. Tactical urbanism is used to re-appropriate the vacant lot for the temporary occupation of artistic actions that translate the four aspects of community identity, discussed in the previous chapter, into design elements and programming opportunities.

The site will serve as an anchor for people to explore the unique qualities and assets of the community, and encourage a sense of place at a time when redevelopment and revitalization projects are causing many to feel uprooted. In light of the temporary occupation of the vacant lot—the lot will eventually be redeveloped—the design strategy integrates temporary and makeshift projects with long-term urban planning development by proposing future re-use or re-purpose of structural elements in other locations throughout Anacostia. This ensures that the memories, social bonds, and identity of the community, associated with the site and materials, are not lost with redevelopment. Due to the open and evolving nature of community-based art and community identity, the design could develop in an infinite number of directions; this chapter explains the criteria for choosing the themes of intervention, which are comprised of both conceptual and physical components.

## **Design Goals**

Weaving together the four aspects of the community activates the visualization of community identity: resources and assets, movement, neighborhood texture, and needs and concerns. The design reflects community identity by employing strategies based on the public art framework, identified in the literature review:

- Community-based public art: public art that emphasizes process and human interaction rather than end products
- Tactical urbanism: small, inexpensive, community-focused interventions that initiate longer-term interventions
- Creative placemaking: the leveraging of the art, culture and creativity to serve the community's needs while embracing future changes and transformations

The result is a public space that is multi-functional, respectful of the land's natural conditions, and rooted in and nurtured by the community. Therefore, the design goals are to:

- Preserve and celebrate culture, history, and tradition while embracing change
- Create a platform for community engagement based on collaboration, conversation, and dialogue
- Construct a visual anchor for the community

## **Design Concept**

The design seeks to weave together the four aspects of the Anacostia community on which its identity is based. The design concept is analogous to a quilt. It is inspired by the many facets of the community that when experienced together, tell the story of its strength, vibrancy—a story that contrasts the negative image that is continually associated with Anacostia. The basic components and construction of a

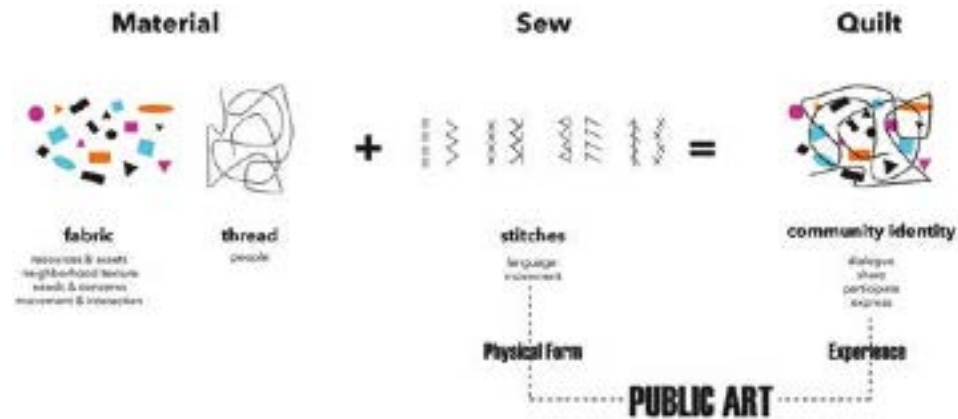


quilt are the joining together of layers of fabric laid out in a strategic and decorative manner and connected by lines of stitching. A quilt can be functional by providing warmth or be purely decorative, as a piece of art that tells a story. In the book *Urban Views: 12 Quilts Inspired by Urban Living*, Cherri House uses basic urban shapes, such as building architecture and street grids, as backdrops for the compositions, which are embellished by adding properties of color, light, texture, balance, and movement (2013). The simple quilt patterns she introduces act as a foundation for further exploration and discovery of one's own quilting style:

Simple or complex, the symmetrical organization of the selected components is key to all decisions that will follow. Once you gain mastery of the construction process in terms of fabric preparation, seam allowances, and block construction, creating any gridded quilt you desire is within your reach.

In the design, community identity is likened to the basic quilt pattern, and acts as a foundation and springboard for further self-realization, as well as rooting people to a sense of place. Conceptually the design follows the quilt making process as follows (Figure 32):

- The process begins with collecting of material: the fabric and thread; the fabric consists of the four aspects of community identity and the thread represents the people who shape it.
- The next step is to use the appropriate stitches to sew the pieces of fabric together. Tactical urbanism is used to shape the physical elements and experiences that stitch together the movement and interactions that activate community identity.
- Once the quilt is finished it begins the journey of telling its story. The final design reflects the activated community identity and begins its journey of facilitating the community in telling their story.



**Figure 32: Design Concept: Quilt Process**

The City’s vision of creating a new urban fabric, prompted the designer to ask how Anacostia fits into this vision. The design is an attempt to ensure that Anacostia’s community identity is woven into the larger urban fabric. The site design acts as a community core that reconnects, rethreads, and reminds people of the resourcefulness and assets in their community.

### **Design Interventions and Programming**

In the following section, the designer explores the various design responses that foster and support the expression and visualization of Anacostia’s community identity—through conceptual and built components. The designer also explains how participants will interact with the project in two ways: by engaging with the physical objects of art, and by forming and strengthening social networks through the experience of walking through the spaces.

The vacant lot is re-appropriated into a multi-functional, social space for the local community that permits layers of use and experience in which people might gather and interact. The site is designed with the understanding that redevelopment will take place, requiring design elements to be mobile, modular, and temporary. The

transient nature of the design, and the activities it supports, allows it to evolve into a vibrant, engaging and ever-changing landscape that can merge with the larger urban fabric (Figure 33).



**Figure 33: Site Plan**

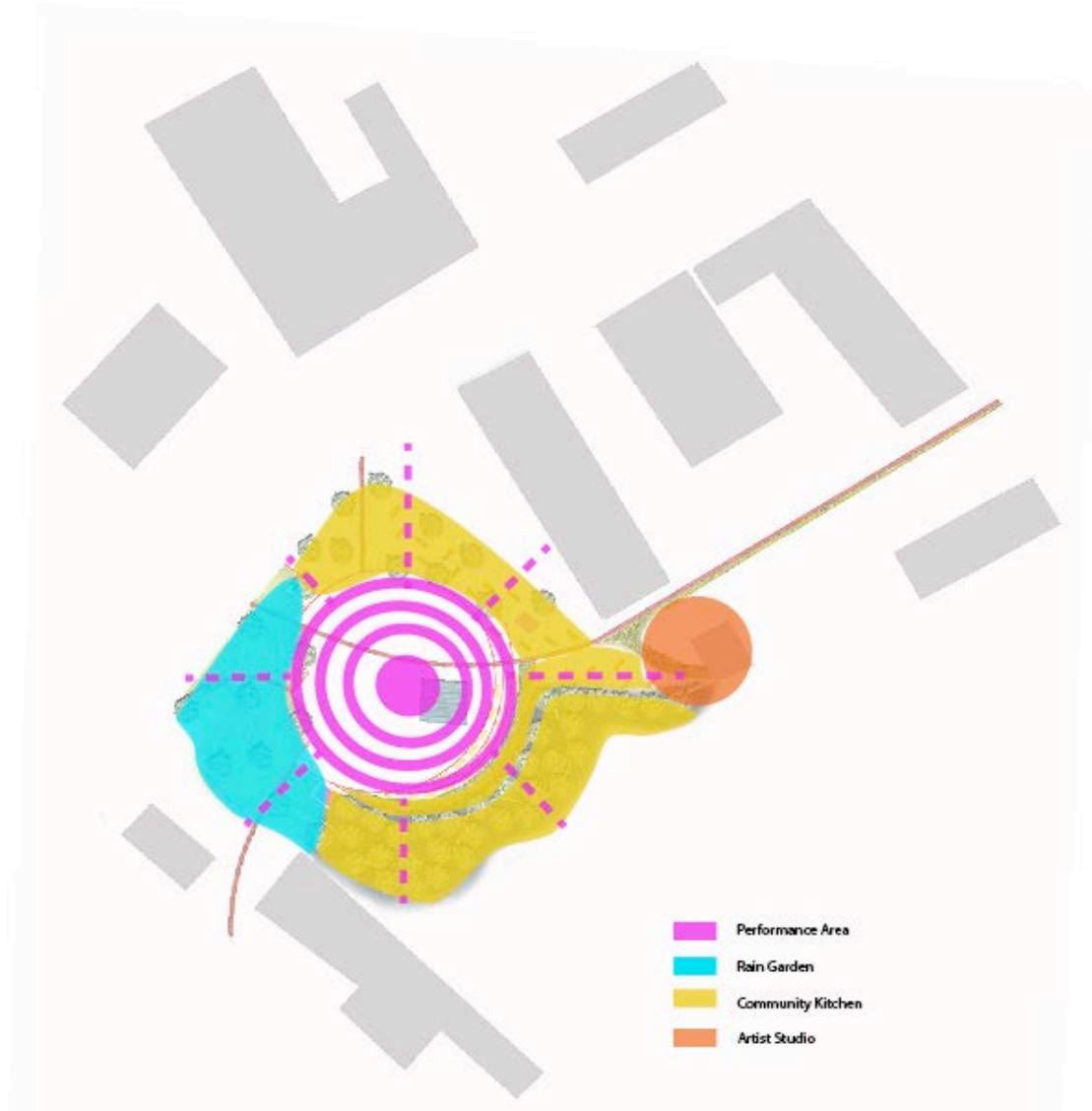
The design extends the site its property line to include the adjacent parking lot, alley and church (Figure 34).



**Figure 34: Site property line (does not include parking lot, alley or church) (Google Maps)**

The site plan consists of four main zones that respond to the community needs and concerns outlined in Chapter 4 (Figure 35): 1) the artist's studio; 2) the rain garden; 3) the performance area; 4) and the community kitchen. The placement and configuration of each zone is based on the opportunities and constraints of the site as summarized in Chapter 4. The objective is to ensure each is in its strongest position relative to the overall site and the other program elements, and to maximize the experience of the visitor by harnessing the built-in features of each location. It is important to note that not all of the needs and concerns outlined in Chapter 4 can be addressed directly on the site. Those that are addressed directly in the design are ones that can be supported by the physical environment and respond to the

practical needs of the residents.



**Figure 35: Programmed Zones**

The following outlines each zone in terms of what community needs are addressed, as well as the choice for their placement in response to the site analysis summarized in Chapter 4.

### **Rain Garden**

While working with the youth (11<sup>th</sup> St. Bridge Park) during the summer of 2012, it became that the students did not have much interaction with their natural environment. Many would not go near the Anacostia River due to their perception of the river as “dirty and polluted” (a result of decades of neglecting the River’s health). The rain garden is an opportunity to educate people about the River, specifically the stormwater issues that affect it and how the garden can be used as a mitigation tool. Additionally, it increases habitat diversity on the site, which currently is a matrix of gravel, weeds, and grass. The location of the rain garden is a response to the location of persistent flooding—the southwest SW corner—that is a result of compacted, impervious soil stemming from years of use as a parking lot. Ultimately, the rain garden will provide functionality, aesthetic improvement, and educational opportunities that together will allow the community to experience and learn about nature.

### **Community Kitchen**

Anacostia is characterized as a food desert—a geographical area where affordable and nutritious food is difficult to obtain. The Anacostia River is the dividing line between District residents with poor diets and those with healthful diets. Pierre N.D. Vigilance, Director of the D.C. Department of Health said, “There are major disparities in the obesity rates in different parts of the city. If you live east of the River, you are more likely to have a higher rate of obesity than if you live in upper Northwest.” Convenience stores, corner stores, Chinese carry-outs, and fried

soul food are staple food choices for neighborhoods east of the river, all of which, contribute to this obesity epidemic. The question becomes: what types of community mobilization will inspire residents to make personal and smart, healthy food choices that lead to long-term and sustainable health behavior changes? Concerned residents have expressed the belief that education is the first step to combating this chronic problem. One resident suggested that, “it should start with the kids who can take back what they learn to their parents and families.”

The Community Kitchen is a space that allows for the growing of vegetables, fruit, and herbs, which support residents’ needs for accessibility to affordable and nutritious food. The term “kitchen” refers to the types of activities that can take place in a kitchen—food preparation, cooking, storytelling, learning—and acts as a source of inspiration for programming that creates experiences that bring people together.

The Community Kitchen is located adjacent to the existing parking lot that belongs to the local businesses along MLK Jr. Ave., which would be preserved for supply and material pick-up and drop off (i.e. soil, harvested produce, trees). Additionally, the parking lot will support the Anacostia Farmers Market, currently held in another parking lot down the street (due to redevelopment of the lot, the Farmers Market needs a new venue to sell). Food grown on site can become part of what is sold at these farmers markets. As illustrated in Figure 34, the Community Kitchen wraps around the performance area and extends into a part of the site that provides more shade due to the wooded area directly adjacent (east) to the site. This divides the community kitchen into three types of growing areas, those for sun-loving plants, shade plants, and deep shade plants.

### **Artist Studio**

Creative placemaking, as discussed Chapter 3, is a strategy used in Anacostia's revitalization to encourage economic investment. This use of creative placemaking has left out many local artists in Anacostia, who feel as though they are not part of this movement. Artists that are supported in the new art galleries in Anacostia (Honfleur, Vivid Solution, Anacostia Art Center) are primarily not from Anacostia, or even from neighborhoods east of the river. There are programs through ARCH Development that provide artist in residency workspace, but again, many of the artist's in residence are not from Ward 8, some are even from over-seas.

Currently, there is a vacant two-car garage (owned by the City) located in the NE corner of the site that provides an opportunity to re-appropriate it into an artist studio in support of Ward 8 artists. The programming for such a proposal is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

### **Performance Area**

The central location of the performance area functions as the central node for the site. The term performance is used loosely and refers to not only performance in the tradition sense—dance, acting, or music performances—but also describes the act of people building and constructing physical elements. The pink concentric circles illustrate central focus that the performance area takes on, while the dashed pink lines conceptually show how it acts as a node that encourages transient movement between the spaces; resources are brought into the center and products are radiated out—either through the site or extend into the larger neighborhood context.



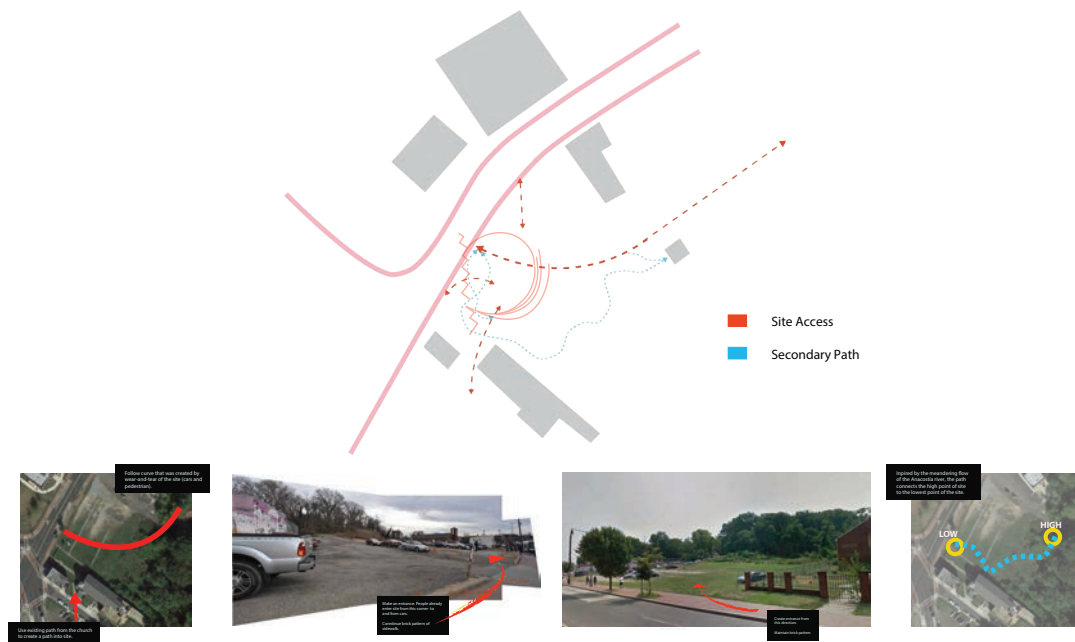
## **Community-Based Art: Physical Framework**

The design embeds the narrative of Anacostia through physical forms that weave the spaces together. The design consists of layers that comprise the physical framework of community-based public art: circulation, material and form, and structures. This framework expresses community identity through design elements, as well as providing the backdrop for the activation of community identity through user experience.

### **Circulation**

The configuration of the circulation paths capture remnants of how people have shaped the landscape—through walking, waiting for the bus or using the site as a parking lot. The design proposes five formal entry points illustrated in Figure 36:

- Enter from three different points along MLK Jr. Ave.
- Enter from Church, extend existing path
- Enter from alley, North of the site



**Figure 36: Inspiration for Circulation**

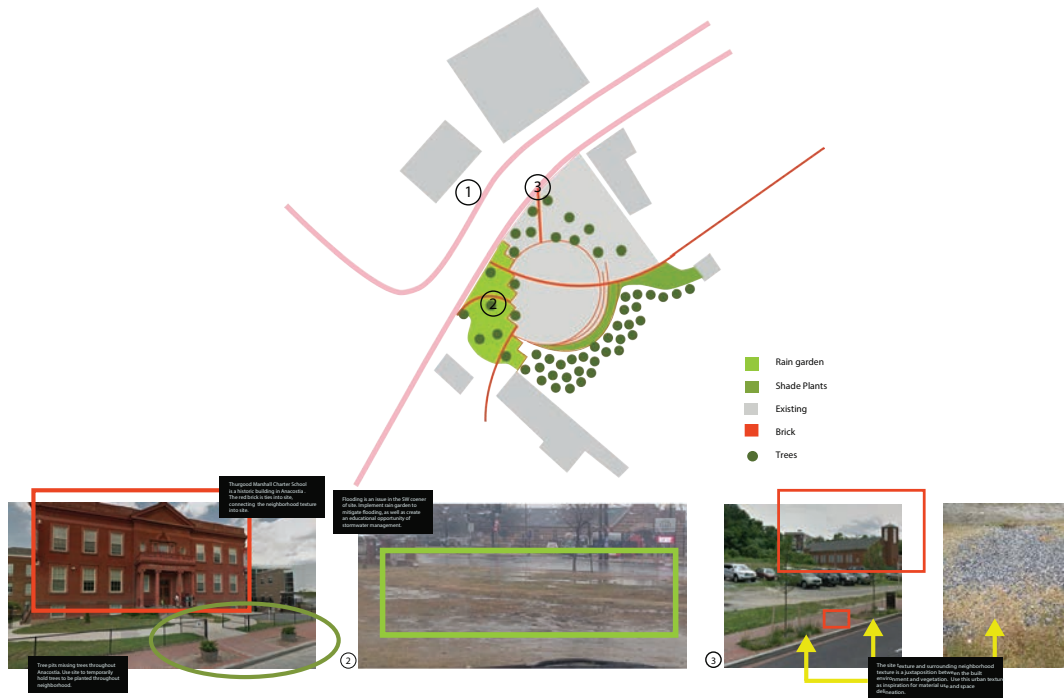
The design proposes extending the existing church path, starting at Howard Rd., into the site. Currently, a chain linked fence blocks people from the church to The extension of this path provides a new opportunity for church users to utilize this space for church functions and activities—such as receptions, cookouts, and meetings.

The path connecting MLK Jr. Ave. to the alley and visa versa is not new, but rather is enhanced and made into a formal circulation path. As mentioned in Chapter 4, from morning into the night, the site acts as a shortcut, as people connect between the neighborhoods. Making this into a formal path, delineated by brick paving, begins to tie in the neighborhood texture.

The secondary circulation, highlighted in blue connects the zones together through a meandering path that is discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

## **Materials and Shapes**

The neighborhood texture inspired the palette of materials and forms—lines, volumes, and shapes—used to integrate visual elements of familiarity from the community that tie the spaces together. For example, brick is a prominent texture used in Anacostia for houses, buildings and street paving. Brick buildings surrounding the site as well as the brick paving that marks MLK Jr. Ave as a main commercial corridor, inspired the use of brick for the main paths—represented in red (Figure 37); weaving the neighborhood texture into the site. The existing site material—grass and gravel—are used for the remaining part of the site, excluding the rain garden.

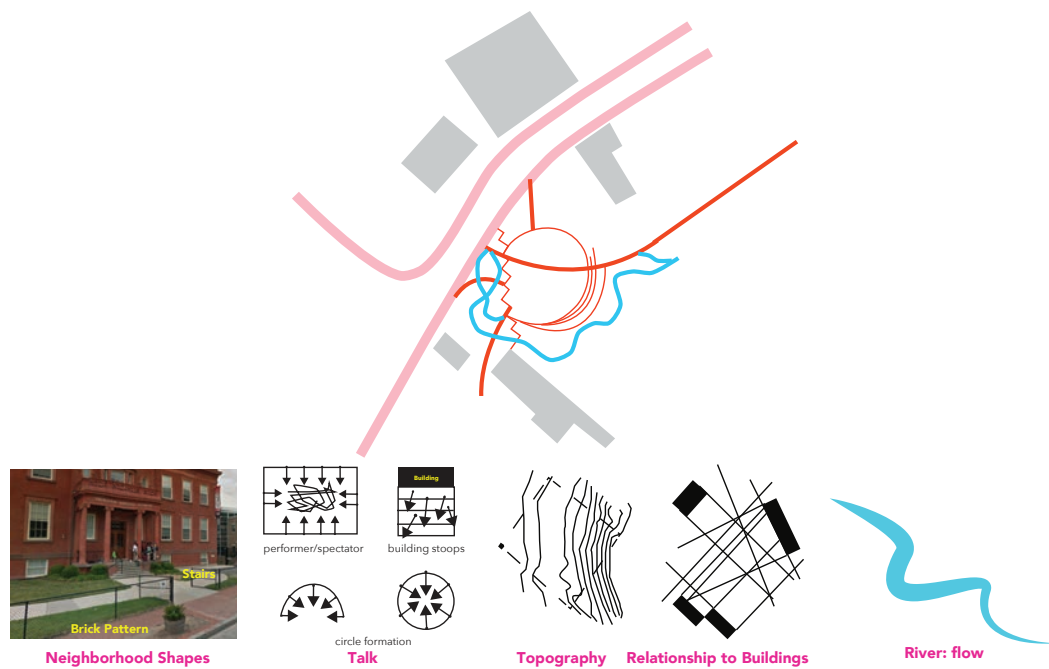


**Figure 37: Integrating The Neighborhood Texture Into The Site**

Currently, Anacostia's urban tree canopy is sparse, with many tree pits missing trees. Collaboration with Casey Tree's initiative, of repopulating the urban tree canopy, the site proposes to temporarily house trees that will later populate the neighborhood. The idea is that the community maintains and cares for these trees while on site, gaining a sense of ownership for tangible elements that are later woven into Anacostia's urban fabric. The importance of residents gaining a sense of ownership over these trees is a response to how some residents currently view the introduction of an urban tree canopy into the neighborhood. Some residents oppose the introduction of street trees, which the designer learned while in attendance at a Historic Anacostia Block Association meeting last March (2013). They expressed that the introduction of trees' signifies the beginning of gentrification. The approach that this design takes in introducing trees' into the community is an attempt to shift

resident's perspectives towards these natural amenities. While on site, the trees are held in planters that double as benches and tables, which are built by the community using recycled material from the neighborhood (i.e. wood palettes, lumber, see Figure 40).

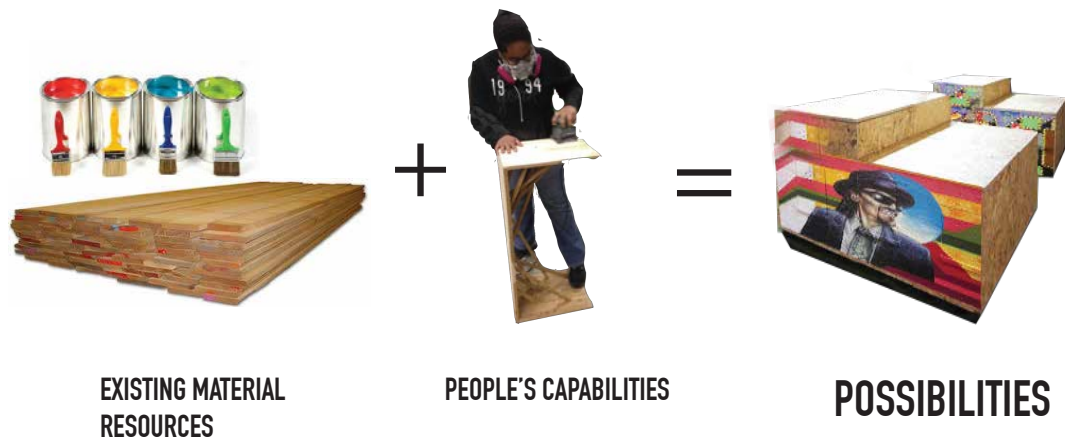
Material for this design is used to help delineate the different spaces. The shapes used to form these spaces are inspired and build on existing social and physical foundations found within the neighborhood, as well as on site. Figure 38 illustrates where inspiration was drawn from: how people congregate to socialize, the site's topography, the site's relationship to surrounding buildings, and the meandering flow of the Anacostia River.



**Figure 38: Inspiration For Design Shapes**

## Structures

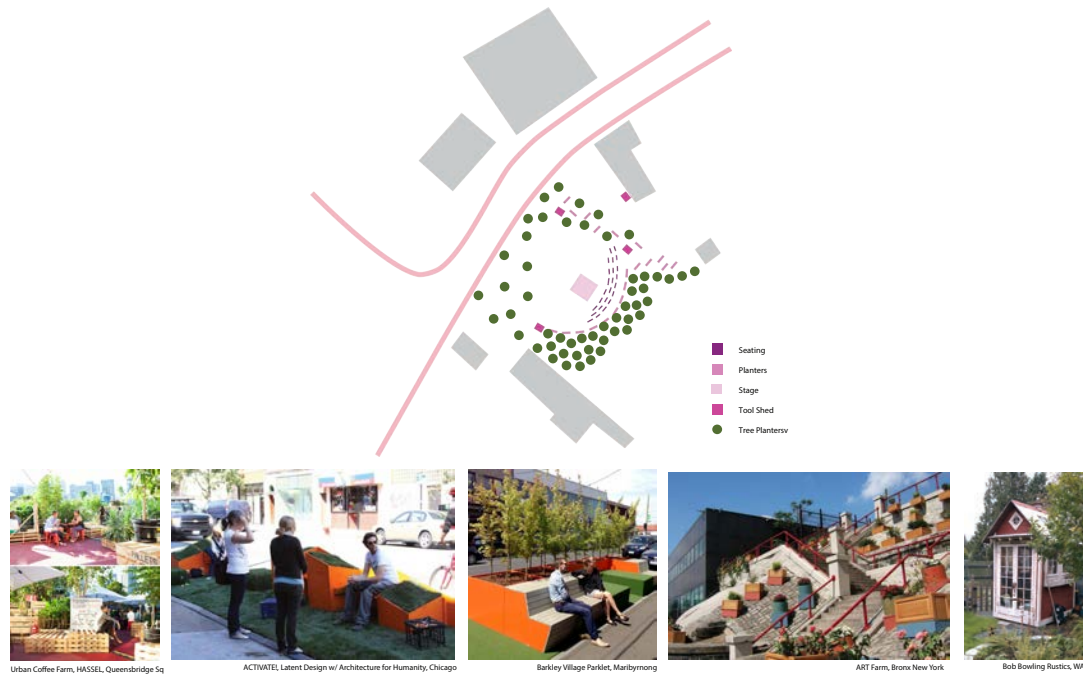
The basis of community-based art is that it is not just about the end result but also about the interaction between people and the process of co-collaboration and co-production (Figure 39). It is important that residents feel that they can contribute meaningfully to decisions made within the community. Therefore, the design utilizes strategies from tactical urbanism— flexibility, reuse, and experimentation—to create the last layer of the physical framework—structures.



**Figure 39: Concept of Tactical Urbanism**

The structures illustrated in Figure 40—seating, planters, stage, tool sheds, tree planters—are proposed as flexible structures that help form a framework for the transient activities and experiences proposed for the site. The term “flexible” refers to their module and mobile nature that makes them highly transferable to other locations throughout the neighborhood as development of the site begins. Each structure is a proposed piece of public art made from materials commonly found on vacant lots, excess material from construction sites, found material from the neighborhood, and

donated material from the community (Figure 41). The designer has identified outside resources that can provide additional material: Community Forklift (501 (C3)), Scrap D.C., architectural firms, engineering and construction companies, and hardware stores. The idea behind tactical urbanism is to rethink what is possible, which requires shifting how we perceive resources. The design encourages the community to work together and explore unlikely avenues to gain the resources needed for any given project. One of the main reasons that projects such as Tactical Anacostia, Place Au Changement, and Les Lieux Possibles, introduced in Chapter 2, were successful was that they all relied on creatively reusing and repurposing material that already existed in the community. Moreover, building these structures will also rely on the resources and skills of the community for their completion and care. Through the act of the community coming together and building these structures, community identity begins to visually take form.



**Figure 40 : Structures**

Base Material: Brick & Crushed Granite



Construction Byproducts



Neighborhood Texture



Community Vestiges



**Figure 41: Reuse material that exists within the neighborhood and community**



The physical framework provides an open platform that enables the freedom of the community to experiment with the space on a temporary basis, creating evolving experiences. The following section discusses programmatic activities that foster the visualization of Anacostia's community identity.

### **Community –Based Art: Experience**

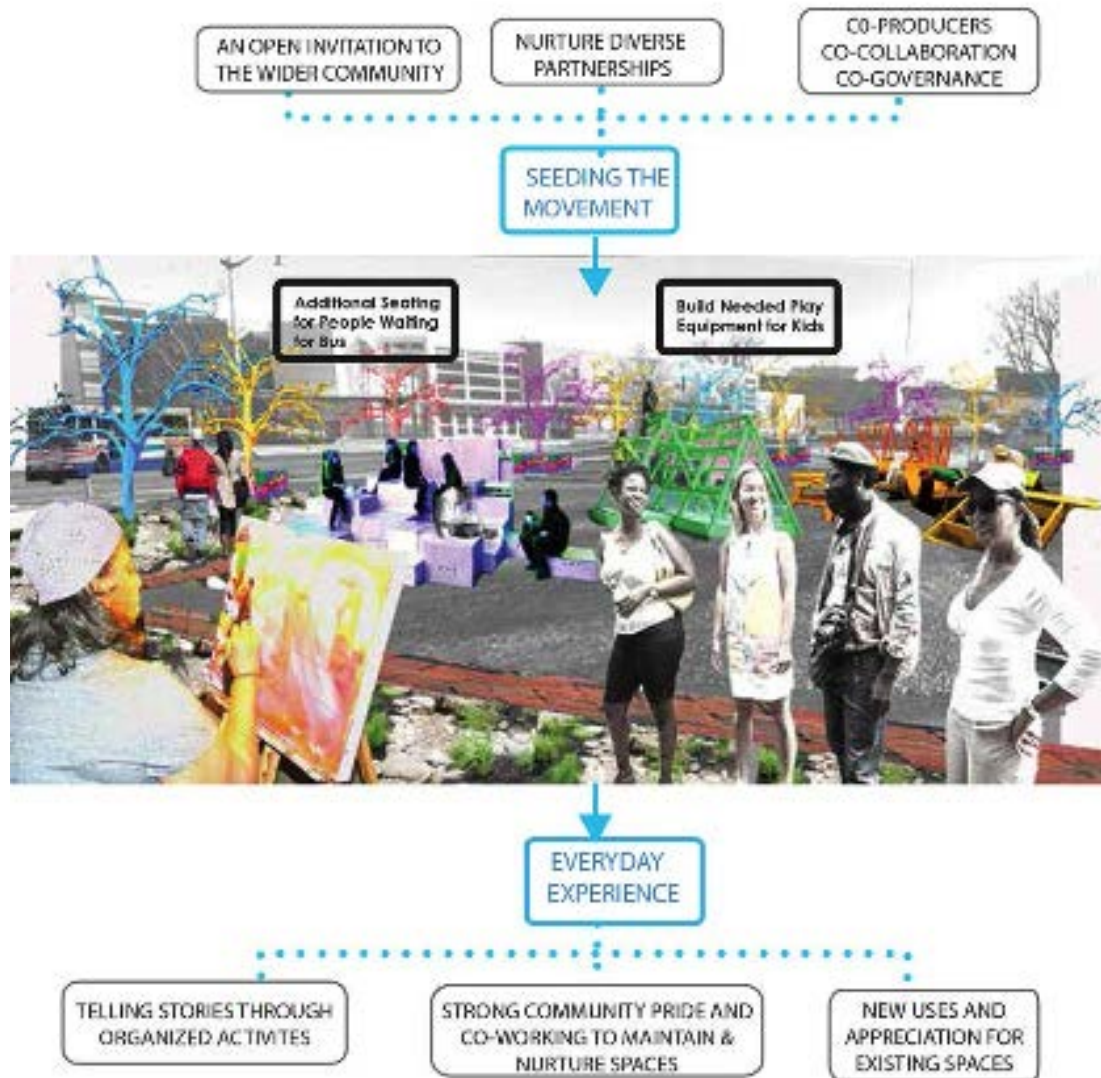
The following section describes possible programming solutions that are rooted in the locality of the community, while also allowing for an open-platform for experimentation in which individuals are both beneficiaries and co-creators of their own space. The site is a place where one can learn new skills, catch-up with friends, share stories—it's about opening peoples' eyes to the whole tapestry of possibilities that exist in the community. Located at Anacostia's gateway node, it is to be a visual anchor that lets people know that they are entering into a vibrant community (Figure 42).



**Figure 42: Design Programming**

In order to achieve the design goals, it is critical that the types of programming reduce barriers to participation, as well as reduce the sense of

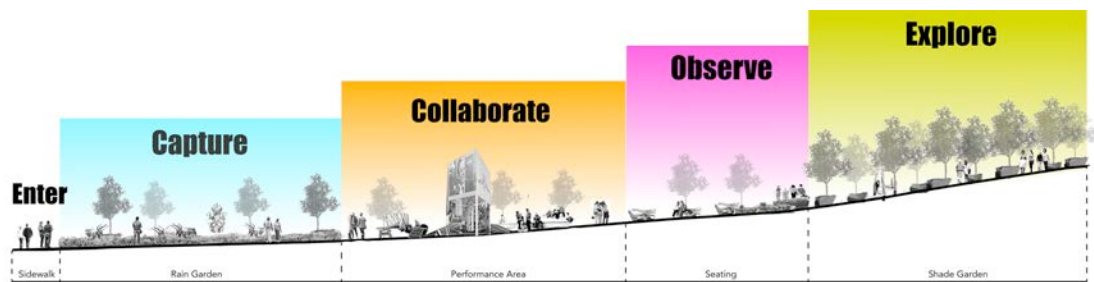
intimidation that can often arise in creative placemaking projects. This requires utilizing a community entity that is inclusive to the wider community—not just active community members—and nurtures diverse partnerships to accomplish the goals of tactical urbanism. The designer proposes that the Ward 8 Arts and Culture Council act as the overarching entity and catalyst that brings together and steers a diverse group of contributors and partnerships to form connections organically. The designer's extensive participation and involvement in with the Ward 8 Arts and Culture Council has provided confidence that the goals of the council coincide with the ultimate goal of this thesis—which is to provide the community a voice and presence during this transition period—using arts and culture as the core to all activities taking place on the site. Figure 43 illustrates proposed inputs required for the desired output experiences. While there are a variety of potential programming activities that the design can support, the chapter proposes partnerships and activities that reflect the locality of the community—learned through immersion into the culture— and foster people's skills and capabilities.



**Figure 43: Input and Output for Design Programming**

The designer will move the reader through the site and programming in order to illustrate the type of experiences a person can have on any given day. The procession through the site begins at MLK Jr. Ave.—an open, and active environment—and continues up to the top of the site—a more intimate and passive environment. The activity level from one end of the site to the other, mirrors the activity level that already exists at these points. Figure 44 demonstrates how as one moves from the street and further into the site, the density of trees increases—shaping

different experiences for the users; more active toward the commercial street and calmer towards the wooded area.



The perspective below (Figure 45) illustrates several important aspects of the design. First, the site is functional year round; the winter perspective shows activities—such as painting, tactical urbanism projects, and people socializing—that can occur on a nice winter day. In the background, the bare winter trees are transformed into pieces of artwork that employ tactical urbanism projects such as “Yarn Bombing” to provide vibrant color and texture to the landscape. The callout pictures in Figure 45 illustrate the daily activities that happen adjacent to site and are briefly discussed in light of how they can integrate into the programming.

The picture to the far left shows students that attend Thurgood Marshall Charter School utilizing the school's staircase for after-school socializing. The site can provide additional space for these socializing moments, as well as provide new after-school activities to participate in.

The bus stop located in front of the site, along MLK Jr. Ave. is a highly used bus stop, which is illustrated in the second picture. The one bench located at the bus stop is not sufficient for the large number of people who use the bus system—especially after-school. As illustrated in the perspective, people can use the seating or even participate in activities taking place while they wait for the bus.

The third picture captures kids, who attend the daycare directly south of site along Howard Rd., passing the site as part of their daily exercise walks along MLK Jr. Ave. The perspective shows kids playing on a new playscape built by the community from reused lumber.

The last image to the far right, shows locals socializing outside the corner store—better known as the “Red Store”—who gather there on a daily basis. One gentlemen referred to themselves as, “A community within a community. If you want to know what's going on in the neighborhood, you come to us.” Many are life-long residents of Anacostia and have a lot of knowledge and wisdom to share with the rest of the community. The site can provide opportunities for these men to share their stories through artistic interventions.

The proposed ideas behind these examples are to illustrate how the physical design elements and different programming initiatives communicate with the surrounding context and responds to how the community already functions.



**Figure 45: Design and programming respond to existing community activities**

Walking into the performance area, a person moves into a space that is open in nature—both in terms of design elements and programming of the space—allowing for flexibility in how the space is used depending on the community needs. The design does not manifest until people fill it with their presence, their curiosity, and their actions. The following perspective (Figure 46) highlights two important activities that successfully bring people in the community together—dance and music. On a daily basis the performance stage can become a place where music and dance groups practice their talents. For example, here the beats and movements of the African Heritage Dancers and Drummers—led by Anacostia resident Melvin Deal—can radiate into the neighborhood streets, attracting people onto the site to watch and even participate. The performance stage can also support students from Savoy



Elementary, who are members of the Savoy Players a drama group that meets and rehearse after school and on weekends a new place to rehearse. For larger events, the performance area and stage can host movie nights, community concerts, cookouts, art exhibits, and even host church events. This is an area where the local talents such as singing, poetry, acting, dancing, music, are highlighted and created.



**Figure 46: Performance Area and Stage**

The design not only acts as a visual anchor for the community during the day but at night as well. Safety is a big concern for the community due to the high level of crime in the neighborhood. As one moves into a more intimate area of the site—created by the increase in number of trees—the nighttime perspective (Figure 47) reveals how the site is illuminated in an aesthetic that is artful and compliments the existing neighborhood aesthetic. Vibrant colors of light illuminate the existing wooded area, in which the site becomes part of the illuminated path that exists along MLK Jr. Av.—North of the site at the other gateway node into Anacostia. As people

transition into this more intimate space, they are greeted by art installations that guide the user along the Story Path.



**Figure 47: Night time perspective, walking along Story Path**

The Story Path is a design element that reveals the rich history and stories of the community through physical art installations along the path, which physically connects the bottom of the site to the top—the rain garden to the artist studio, respectively (Figure 48). The need to pass on cultural knowledge is a powerful reality in Anacostia, at a time when many residents feel vulnerable that their stories will be paved over. Folklore and storytelling are important to residents and knowing this, in terms of community dialogue, made it important for the design to provide an opportunity for storytelling to emerge. The Anacostia River is used as metaphor for the Story Path that uses public art installations to capture stories of the community. Much like how the River has for centuries, captured and shaped the rich and dynamic stories that make up Anacostia’s history. The path takes on a meandering form like



the River, and moves the user from higher elevation to lower elevation and visa versa, which is inspired by the flow of water. Illustrated in Figure 48, starting at the top of the site—representing the deeper history of the Anacostia community—one meanders down to the bottom of the site where the rain garden collects the water—representing the present stories of the community. The public art installations vary in size, but the idea is that they inspire thoughtful conversations and learning around storytelling. Partnerships between community resources such as: the Anacostia Historic Association, the Anacostia Community Museum, schools, and local artists can collaborate on creating artworks that animate these community stories.



**Figure 48: Story Path using the Anacostia River as metaphor**

Over looking the entirety of the site (Figure 49), nestled between the dense trees, sits the Artist Studio. The Artist Studio is a re-appropriated vacant two-car garage that is used for a rotating artist-in-residency program (Figure 50). A rotational system—such as two-month occupation—is needed to ensure as many local artists have the opportunity to create and expose their artwork. The designer proposes that

artists pay in kind for the space by offering workshops and mentorship programs for students at the local schools. For example, Savoy Elementary, across the street, is an Arts Education Institution centered on the idea of “creating an exciting environment where young people are fearless in their academic accomplishments,” (Principal of Savoy Elementary). Artists can support the schools mission by fostering the kids’ creativity through collaboration in creating art installations for the Story Path. As one of the eight low-performing schools—in reading in math—Savoy elementary was chosen to participate in the Turnaround Arts initiative as part of the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities. Savoy receives funding from public-private partnerships in order to help narrow the achievement gap and increase student engagement through the arts. This is a potential funding source for projects that occur on the site, as well as the additional support from the partnerships that support the initiative, such as:

- National Gallery of Art
- Bank of America-Junior Achievement
- Far Southeast Family Strengthening Collaborative
- Kennedy Center
- Washington Performing Arts Society
- Imagination Stage



**Figure 49: View looking out from top of the site where Artist Studio is proposed**

The perspective below (Figure 50) highlights another important design element that extends the site beyond its boundary lines and into the larger neighborhood fabric—Artist Alley. As mentioned in the Site Inventory chapter, the site is currently used as a shortcut for people walking to and from MLK Jr. Ave. to the alley that leads into the neighborhood directly north of the site. Artwork that is created on site by the community is to transform the dark, unwelcoming alley into a vibrant art gallery, which showcases the local talent.



**Figure 50: Artists Studio and Artist Alley**

Entering the site from the Artist Alley or Artist Studio, a person is welcomed into the Community Kitchen. As described earlier in the chapter, the family kitchens and the types of activities that can take place in the kitchen inspire the Community Kitchen. The concept brings the communal experience of growing fresh produce, cooking, communal eating, and the sharing of stories and recipes to the public realm (Figure 51).



**Figure 51: People socializing, cooking, and eating in the Community Kitchen**

Over the past two decades, the simple act of bringing people together has become recognized as an art form—developing the ritual of sharing a meal into the basis for artwork. Artists all over the world are working with food as an artistic medium because of the inherent abilities it has to bring people together. Projects such as Public Kitchen in Boston, Massachusetts, which incorporates community involvement, local food, food exchange, the creative use of vacant land exemplify the power food has as a common language between diverse populations (Figure 52).

Kenneth Bailey, founder of Public Kitchen believes that, “There’s a real desire, world-wide, to connect around food. Just the range of people who came together around issues of food, for the variety of reasons they did, was incredible. There is a lot of power there and potential to change our relationship to food and change our relationship to the public and each other through these kinds of gestures and endeavors.” Food is one of the oldest forms of exchange and our dependence on food is often cited as the most basic elements that connect people all over the world (Lydon 2012). The designer had the chance to experience this phenomenon while attending three community cookouts during the 2013 summer months, and proposes that community events such as these become an integral part of design programming. For example, Public art projects such as Tactile Anacostia, discussed in Chapter 2, encourages narratives around the social history of food. Building off of this precedent, a possible programming element for the Community Kitchen is to collect recipes from people in the community that are then incorporated into community meals served each week—each meal having a personal story attached to them. Figure 53 is an example of how the community can archive their stories, such as recipes, using an interactive piece of public art that displays and shares them with others.





**Figure 52: Public Kitchen (Pictures courtesy of Design Studio for Social Intervention)**



**Figure 53: Public artwork that functions as an archive for community mementos such as recipes (Picture courtesy of <http://www.stiftungfreizeit.com/2011/10/box-it.html>)**

Attendance to a Ward 8 Arts and Culture Council meeting on April 12, 2014, provided the designer with residents feedback on the idea of introducing a Community Kitchen. The designer presented the following elements that would serve as a foundation for the Community Kitchen:

- Demonstration plots to grow fruits, vegetables, and herbs
- A cooking area with a barbeque pit or grill and tables food preparation
- Tables and seating for eating and socializing
- An art installation that showcases resident food recipes and other community

Some of the residents' responses were:

- “One of the things I enjoy are canning projects and would be interested in conducting a canning workshop as part of this initiative.”
- “I’ve talked with people who have expressed the need for an actual venue where people can come and experience the act of cooking.”

- “I would want to learn from people. I am always wondering what’s going on in someone’s kitchen or what that smell is, especially my neighbor I want to always knock on their door because I can always smell what they are cooking and it smells so good.”
- “I would want to use the space to promote my cooking. I love cooking and so every Monday I cook for the community, out of my house. The meals are free. It is a way for me to practice and get feedback on my cooking. I would love to have my own restaurant one day.”

Additionally, the growing of fresh produce is intended to help people become better skilled at planting and tending to fresh produce and foster new relationships with food. For example, students from Thurgood Marshall Charter School and Savoy Elementary can expand the organic garden that they currently tend to on school grounds<sup>5</sup> and share their knowledge with the rest of the community.. Like the other parts of the design, the demonstration plots are to be co-governed by the community and open to anybody who wants to participate.



**Figure 54: Community members growing fresh produce in demonstration plots**

<sup>5</sup> Organic Garden is a collaboration between Thurgood Marshall Charter School and Savoy Elementary School made possible by a grant from Earth Day Network.



The design's integrity and success depends on people's attachment and ownership over the physical site, as well as their involvement with everyday activities. The programming and types of experiences proposed in this chapter represent only a fraction of what is possible when people come together for a common cause. The activities respond to the locality while allowing new community-based partnerships—between residents, institutions, stakeholders, and community organizations—and experiences to grow in order to cultivate stewardship of place from day one.

### **Next Steps**

The design consists of four phases that allow the project to gradually unfold while the audience participates. The next step in the project development will be to introduce the design to the community, which begins the conversation about the possibilities for both the vacant-lot and the community at large.

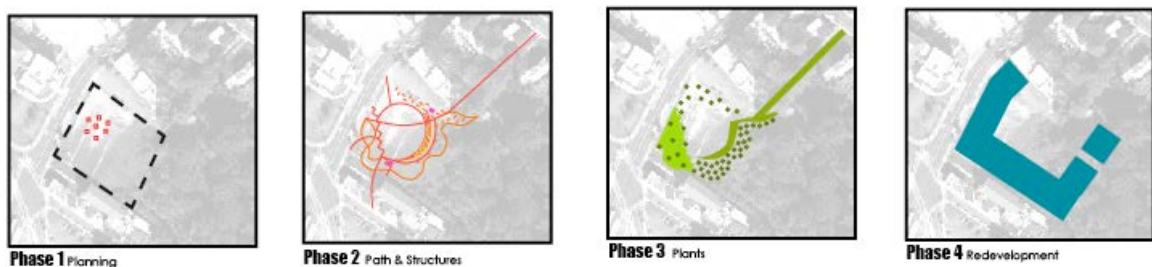
Phase 1, the planning phase, is the first level of engagement that people will have with the site, requiring people to re-think how community input and feedback are heard, collected, and used. Modeled after the Collectif Etc. and Bruit Du Frigo projects (introduced in the Precedent chapter), community meetings are to take place on the site to ensure that *anybody* who wants to participate can. By moving community meetings into the public domain, it allows the community to build purpose among a diverse group of people; it is also intended to make public the plans by the city, private developers, and nonprofit developers. Before the community engages with the site, the first act of tactical urbanism—providing the needed seating and tables to support such meetings (Figure 55)—must be accomplished.



**Figure 55: Using tactical urbanism strategies to build needed seating and tables for initial community meetings.**

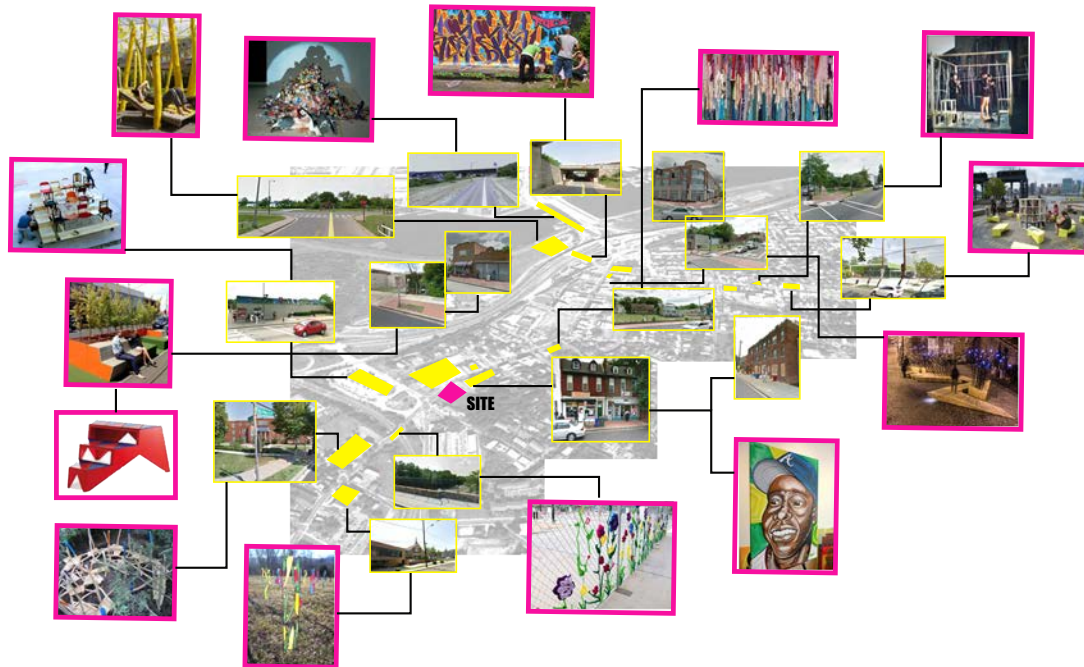
Gradually revealing the design rather than presenting the entirety of it at one time, builds awareness that something different is taking place, which initiates curiosity. Starting with visible, low-threshold intervention builds a shared language of change, and a pathway for future steps to unfold. As illustrated in Figure 56, three more phases follow the initial planning phase. Phases two and three consist of laying down the walkways, building structures, and incorporating plant material: trees, rain garden plants, and edible plants. The final phase, phase four, involves the gradual

redevelopment of the site. At this time, the community proposes which physical elements and programming should live on in other capacities and locations throughout Anacostia. This aspect differs from tactical urbanism projects, which often occupy a space for a certain amount of time but then disappear when projects are completed. Rethreading elements of the design into the larger urban fabric ensures that the memories, social networks, and stories are not lost with redevelopment. Also, collaboration with existing initiatives (refer to page 43), both during and after the design's lifetime, can provide ease of integration with the larger neighborhood projects when redevelopment does occur. Figure 57 highlights possible locations



**Figure 56: The design consists of four phases.**

throughout the neighborhood that could benefit from artistic interventions—aesthetic and functional—such as bus stops, the Anacostia Metro, schools, churches, local businesses, vacant lots, the Anacostia library, bridges, and other locations.



**Figure 57: Tentative locations throughout Anacostia that can benefit from public art made on the site.**

The designer has identified funding opportunities to further develop the research and design presented for this thesis. The following resources believe and promote the importance of public art for the purpose of improving peoples quality of life:

### ***National Endowment for the Arts: Our Town Grant***

Our Town grant provides funding for creative placemaking projects that, “improve peoples’ quality of life, encourage greater creative activity; foster stronger community identity and a sense of place; and revitalize economic development with the arts at their core” (Our Town Grant 2014).

### ***Artplace: Innovation Grants Program***

This program is designed to invest in creative placemaking projects that “reach new possibilities and involve a variety of partners who together are committed to increasing the vibrancy and diversity of their communities” (Innovation 2014). These projects are to lead through the arts that have strong local-buy-in, integrate with a community’s economic development and community revitalization strategies, and have the potential to attract additional private and public support to the community.

### ***DC Commissions for the Arts and Humanities: DC Creates! Public Art Program***

See pages 41 and 42

### ***DC Office of Planning 5x5***

5x5 is Washington’s temporary public art initiative, resulting in twenty-five public art installations, presented concurrently throughout the City. The projects are to, “activate and enliven publicly accessible spaces, as well as add an ephemeral layer of creativity and artistic expression to neighborhoods” (5x5 2014). Some of the types of media and artforms considered include: visual art, performance, light design, digital composition, projection, and event-based work.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This community-based public art design builds upon people's skill sets and talents, strengthens social networks, and provides a tangible form of localism that reflects Anacostia's community identity. Public art is transformed from mere objects in space to sites of interactive experiences that are rooted in local needs and opportunities—communicating to users that they are highly valued during the redevelopment process. Tactical urbanism and cultural programming work in tandem to re-define what a vacant lot can mean to a place and its people by creating an evolving civic platform based on grass-root creativity and experimentation. Weaving together the layers of community identity through physical and visual form helps tell a different story of what is possible for the community and how to achieve it.

### *Implications for the Profession of Landscape Architecture*

One of the most important implications for the design is to inspire people — the general public, planners, designers, public and private groups—through an awareness of community identity by bringing them together around a platform which leverages existing and undervalued resources (both the physical and social dimensions of the community). In order to unlock dormant assets, this thesis hypothesizes that it first requires an awareness of what already exists in the community and neighborhood. Central to this process is the growing of people's skills and capabilities by creating a place that elicits the community's participation; transforming the public from passive viewers to informed citizens, who play a role in

its construction. Meaningful participation occurs within clear, realistic and low-threshold frameworks (Ahrensbach 2012). Throughout this thesis, several creative, artistic, urban interventions have exemplified the success of nurturing such frameworks. They pay particular attention to the full experience of a place—not just the physical layout, materials and aesthetics but also its social dimensions and narratives. The designer believes this approach generates a genuine local pride and belonging.

There is a need for small-scale, co-created projects to be precursors to larger, long-term master plans, as well as the occupation of spaces in transition to complement and become a part of the major phases of urban redevelopment projects. The formalized timescales of large-scale action and master plans often have little relevance to enabling social capital to emerge in the short term (Ahrensbach 2012). Investing in these incremental approaches during redevelopment serves to build a shared language of tangible change that can be achieved now. This shows people that their contributions are integral to the process rather than solely relying on long-term planning, which seems increasingly disconnected from the actual users the changes are intended for. The Design Response chapter identified diverse and mixed mode funding strategies that consist of investments from other currencies besides money such as people's time, trust, and social networks.

The exponential growth and support of community-based public art, tactical urbanism, and creative placemaking projects over the past decade depicts that even within current policy contexts, people have found ways to overcome constraints in the status quo in order to generate collaboration between organizations and foster

experimentation. Therefore, it may be the perception, rather than the reality, of something being impossible that impedes innovation. But even still there is a need for a shift in planning and zoning policies that address the operational challenges of re-occupying empty buildings and sites, which the City (Washington D.C.) currently struggles to make available for temporary use.

Perhaps the most beneficial learning outcome from the research and design is understanding the landscape architects role in ensuring social equity as a vital component of the design process. Using the ethnography research method the designer learned about the community in a way that let the complexity of place and people take on form. Often, traditional methods exercised by landscape architects and the design profession—such as charette and focus groups for the purpose of gaining insight, input and feedback from the community—provides only a glimpse into what really makes up the complex networks of a community.

Approaching community engagement through immersion provided the designer insight into the type of information that is missing when only traditional methods of community engagement are employed. Meg Calkins, in *The Sustainable Sites Handbook: A Complete Guide to the Principles, Strategies, and Practices for Sustainable Landscapes* explains that “While designers can extrapolate the expected user population using marketing studies, demographics, and other predictive devices, there is no substitute for talking to site users and stakeholders directly” (2012). The designer does recognize that this approach is time consuming and proposes further research on how elements of ethnography can be integrated into the site inventory



phase of design, while working with the limited timeframes often associated with design projects.

This thesis approaches community-based public art, tactical urbanism, and creative placemaking not as strategies that target economic investment, rather as strategies used to foster social equity for the community and empower the community to challenge the values of urban redevelopment. The project employs a methodology that provides a platform for the community to be inclusive members of the redevelopment process, which too often is not prioritized, particularly in marginalized communities. In addition, it proposes that public policy makers, urban planners, designers, stakeholders, community organizations, and residents must work in concert to make social equity a priority in the design process. “In face of increasing encroachment on public space by corporate and consumer interests, an agenda for urban redevelopment is pressing, and entails a re-visioning of how and by whom the form of the city is determined, whether that form is designed to be permanent or to be mutable” (Arpa 2011).

Public art ideally creates better places and provides enjoyment, insight, and may even provide hope to its participants, viewers, and users (Guetzkow 2002). But it cannot correct deeper problems stemming from issues of unemployment, poverty, and other social ills that are currently taking place throughout Ward 8. Rather, this community-based public art design provides an avenue for inclusion in the redevelopment and revitalization of the neighborhood. It is a strategy that re-appropriates a vacant lot from being an urban margin to something that is rooted in the community’s everyday life and experience in order to activate its community

identity. Through the production of events, telling stories, building of relationships and the archiving of materials, the design fosters neighborhood leadership and participation that celebrates the legacy of the neighborhood as well as support the capacity to address shared challenges and move forth as a part of Anacostia's transformation.

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## **District of Columbia Plans and Initiatives**

### ***Anacostia Transit Area Strategic Investment Plan***

<http://planning.dc.gov/DC/Planning/In+Your+Neighborhood/Wards/Ward+8/Small+Area+Plans+&+Studies/Anacostia+Transit+Area+Strategic+Investment+Plan>

### ***Barry Farm Park Chester Wade Road Redevelopment Plan***

<http://planning.dc.gov/DC/Planning/In+Your+Neighborhood/Wards/Ward+8/Small+Area+Plans+&+Studies/Barry+Farm+Park+Chester+Wade+Road+Redevelopment+Plan>

### ***D.C. Comprehensive Plan-2006***

<http://planning.dc.gov/DC/Planning/Across+the+City/Comprehensive+Plan/2006+Comprehensive+Plan>

### ***DC Creates! Public Art Master Plan***

[http://dcarts.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcarts/publication/attachments/Public%20Art%20Master%20Plan\\_0.pdf](http://dcarts.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcarts/publication/attachments/Public%20Art%20Master%20Plan_0.pdf)

### ***Great Streets Initiative***

<http://greatstreets.dc.gov>

### ***Greening Americas Capitals***

[http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/pdf/gac/washington\\_dc\\_low.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/pdf/gac/washington_dc_low.pdf)

### ***The Anacostia Waterfront Framework Plan-2003***

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/92302048/The-Anacostia-Waterfront-Framework-Plan-2003>